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VOL. 2296.

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE BY WILLIAM BLACK

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 1.

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JUDITH SHAKESPEARE.

A ROMANCE.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "A PRINCESS OF THULE," "SHANDON BELLS,"
ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1884.

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JUDITH SHAKESPEARE.

CHAPTER I.

AN ASSIGNATION.

IT was a fair, clear, and shining morning, in the sweet May-time of the year, when a young English damsel went forth from the town of Stratford-upon-Avon to walk in the fields. As she passed along by the Guild Chapel and the Grammar School, this one and the other that met her gave her a kindly greeting; for nearly every one knew her, and she was a favourite; and she returned those salutations with a frankness which betokened rather the self-possession of a young woman than the timidity of a girl. Indeed, she was no longer in the first sensitive dawn of maidenhood—having, in fact, but recently passed her five-and-twentieth birthday; but nevertheless there was the radiance of youth in the rose-leaf tint of her cheeks, and in the bright cheerfulness of her eyes. Those eyes were large, clear, and gray, with dark pupils and dark lashes; and these are of a dangerous kind; for they can look demure and artless and innocent when there is nothing in the mind

of the owner of them but a secret mirth; and also—and alas!—they can effect another kind of concealment, and when the heart within is inclined to soft pity and yielding, they can refuse to confess to any such surrender, and can maintain, at the bidding of a wilful coquetry, an outward and obstinate coldness and indifference. For the rest, her hair, which was somewhat short and curly, was of a light and glossy brown, with a touch of sunshine in it; she had a good figure, for she came of a quite notedly handsome family; she walked with a light step and a gracious carriage; and there were certain touches of style and colour about her costume which showed that she did not in the least undervalue her appearance. And so it was “Good-morrow to you, sweet Mistress Judith,” from this one and the other; and “Good-morrow, friend So-and-so,” she would answer; and always she had the brightest of smiles for them as they passed.

Well, she went along by the church, and over the foot-bridge spanning the Avon, and so into the meadows lying adjacent to the stream. To all appearance she was bent on nothing but deliberate idleness, for she strayed this way and that, stooping to pick up a few wild flowers, and humming to herself as she went. On this fresh and clear morning the air seemed to be filled with sweet perfumes after the close atmosphere of the town; and if it was merely to gather daisies and cuckoo-flowers and buttercups that she had come, she was obviously in no hurry about it. The sun was warm on the rich green grass; the swallows were dipping and flashing

over the river; great bumble-bees went booming by; and far away somewhere in the silver-clear heavens a lark was singing. And she also was singing, as she strayed along by the side of the stream, picking here and there a speed-well, and here and there a bit of self-heal, or white dead-nettle; if, indeed, that could be termed singing that was but a careless and unconscious recalling of snatches of old songs and madrigals. At one moment it was—

“Why, say you so? Oh no, no, no;
Young maids must never a-wooing go.”

And again it was—

“Come, blow thy horn, hunter!
Come, blow thy horn, hunter!
Come, blow thy horn, jolly hunter!”

And again it was—

“For a morn in spring is the sweetest thing
Cometh in all the year!”

And in truth she could not have lit upon a sweeter morning than this was; just as a chance passer-by might have said to himself that he had never seen a pleasanter sight than this young English maiden presented as she went idly along the river-side, gathering wild flowers the while.

But in course of time, when she came to a part of the Avon from which the bank rose sharp and steep, and when she began to make her way along a narrow and winding footpath that ascended through the wilderness of trees and bushes hanging on this steep bank, she became more circumspect. There was no longer any humming of songs; the gathering of flowers was abandoned, though here she might

have added a wild hyacinth or two to her nosegay; she advanced cautiously, and yet with an affectation of carelessness; and she was examining, while pretending not to examine, the various avenues and open spaces in the dense mass of foliage before her. Apparently, however, this world of sunlight and green leaves and cool shadow was quite untenanted; there was no sound but that of the blackbird and the thrush; she wandered on without meeting any one. And then, as she had now arrived at a little dell or chasm in the wood, she left the footpath, climbed up the bank, gained the summit, and finally, passing from among the bushes, she found herself in the open, at the corner of a field of young corn.

Now if any one had noticed the quick and searching look that she flashed all around on the moment of her emerging from the brushwood—the swiftness of lightning was in that rapid scrutiny—he might have had some suspicion as to the errand that had brought her hither; but in an instant her eyes had recovered their ordinary look of calm and indifferent observation. She turned to regard the wide landscape spread out below her; and the stranger, if he had missed that quick and eager glance, would have naturally supposed that she had climbed up through the wood to this open space merely to have a better view. And, indeed, this stretch of English-looking country was well worth the trouble, especially at such a time of the year, when it was clothed in the fresh and tender colours of the spring-time; and it was with much seeming content that this young English maiden stood there

and looked abroad over the prospect—at the placid river winding through the lush meadows; at the wooden spire of the church rising above the young foliage of the elms; at here and there in the town a red-tiled house visible among the thatched roofs and gray walls and orchards—these being all pale and ethereal and dream-like in the still sunshine of this quiet morning. It was a peaceful, English-looking picture, that ought to have interested her, however familiar it may have been; and perhaps it was only to look at it once more that she had made her way up hither; and also to breathe the cool sweet air of the open, and to listen to the singing of the birds, that seemed to fill the white wide spaces of the sky as far as ever she could hear.

Suddenly she became aware that some one was behind her and near her, and, instantly turning, she found before her an elderly man with a voluminous gray beard, who appeared to affect some kind of concealment by the way he wore his hat and his long cloak.

“God save you, sweet lady!” he had said, almost before she turned.

But if the stranger imagined that by his unlooked-for approach and sudden address he was likely to startle this young damsel out of her self-possession, he knew very little with whom he had to deal.

“Give ye good-morrow, good Master Wizard,” said she, with perfect calmness, and she regarded him from head to foot with nothing beyond a mild curiosity. Indeed, it was rather he who was embar-

rassed. He looked at her with a kind of wonder—and admiration also; and if she had been sufficiently heedful and watchful she might have observed that his eyes, which were singularly dark, had a good deal of animation in them for one of his years. It was only after a second or so of this bewildered and admiring contemplation of her that he managed to say, in a grave and formal voice, something in praise of her courage in thus keeping the appointment he had sought.

“Nay, good sir,” said she, with much complacency, “trouble not yourself about me. There is no harm in going out to gather a few flowers in the field, surely. If there be any danger it is rather you that have to fear it, for there is the pillory for them that go about the country divining for gold and silver.”

“It is for no such vain and idle purposes that I use my art,” said he; and he regarded her with such an intensity of interest that sometimes he stumbled forgetfully in his speech, as if he were repeating a lesson but ill prepared. “It is for the revelation of the future to them that are born under fortunate planets. And you are one of these, sweet lady, or I would not have summoned you to a meeting that might have seemed perilous to one of less courage and good heart. If it please you to listen, I can forecast that that will befall you——”

“Nay, good sir,” said she, with a smile, “I have heard it frequently, though perhaps never from one so skilled. ’Tis but a question between dark and fair, with plenty of money and lands thrown in. For

that matter I might set up in the trade myself. But if you could tell me now——”

“If I were to tell you—if by my art I could show you,” said he, with a solemnity that was at least meant to be impressive (though this young maid, with her lips inclining to a smile, and her inscrutable eyes, did not seem much awe-stricken)—“if I could convince you, sweet lady, that you shall marry neither dark nor fair among any of those that would now fain win you—and rumour says there be several of those—what then?”

“Rumour?” she repeated, with the colour swiftly mantling in her face. But she was startled, and she said quickly, “What do you say, good wizard? Not any one that I know? What surety have you of that? Is it true? Can you show it to me? Can you assure me of it? Is your skill so great that you can prove to me that your prophecy is aught but idle guessing? No one that I have seen as yet, say you? Why,” she added, half to herself, “but that were good news for my gossip Prue.”

“My daughter,” said this elderly person, in slow and measured tones, “it is not to all that the stars have been so propitious at their birth.”

“Good sir,” said she, with some eagerness, “I beseech you forgive me if I attend you not; but—but this is the truth now as to how I came in answer to your message to me. I will speak plain. Perchance rumour hath not quite belied herself. There may be one or two who think too well of me, and would have me choose him or him to be my lover; and—and—do you see now?—if there were

one of those that I would fain have turn aside from idle thoughts of me and show more favour to my dear cousin and gossip Prudence Shawe—nay, but to tell the truth, good wizard, I came here to seek of your skill whether it could afford some charm and magic that would direct his heart to her. I have heard of such things——”

And here she stopped abruptly, in some confusion, for she had in her eagerness admitted a half-belief in the possible power of his witchcraft which she had been careful to conceal before. She had professed incredulity by her very manner; she had almost laughed at his pretensions; she had intimated that she had come hither only out of curiosity; but now she had blundered into the confession that she had cherished some vague hope of obtaining a love-philtre, or some such thing, to transfer away from herself to her friend the affections of one of those suitors whose existence seemed to be so well known to the wizard. However, he soon relieved her from her embarrassment by assuring her that this that she demanded was far away beyond the scope of his art, which was strictly limited to the discovery and revelation of such secrets as still lay within the future.

“And if so, good sir,” said she, after a moment’s reflection, “that were enough, or nearly enough, so that you can convince us of it.”

“To you yourself alone, gracious lady,” said he, “can I reveal that which will happen to you. Nay, more, so fortunate is the conjunction of the planets that reigned at your birth—the *ultimum supplicium*

auri might almost have been declared to you—that I can summon from the ends of the earth, be he where he may, the man that you shall hereafter marry, or soon or late I know not: if you will, you can behold him at such and such a time, at such and such a place, as the stars shall appoint.”

She looked puzzled, half-incredulous and perplexed, inclined to smile, blushing somewhat, and all uncertain.

“It is a temptation—I were no woman else,” said she, with a laugh. “Nay, but if I can see him, why may not others? And if I can show them him who is to be my worshipful lord and master, why, then, my gossip Prue may have the better chance of reaching the goal where I doubt not her heart is fixed. Come, then, to prove your skill, good sir. Where shall I see him, and when? Must I use charms? Will he speak, think you, or pass as a ghost? But if he be not a proper man, good wizard, by my life I will have none of him, nor of your magic either.”

She was laughing now, and rather counterfeiting a kind of scorn; but she was curious; and she watched him with a lively interest as he took forth from a small leather bag a little folded piece of paper, which he carefully opened.

“I cannot answer all your questions, my daughter,” said he; “I can but proceed according to my art. Whether the person you will see may be visible to others I know not, nor can I tell you aught of his name or condition. Pray Heaven he be worthy of such beauty and gentleness; for I had heard of you,

gracious lady, but rumour had but poor words to describe such a rarity and a prize."

"Nay," said she, in tones of reproof (but the colour had mounted to a face that certainly showed no sign of displeasure), "you speak like one of the courtiers now."

"This charm," said he, dropping his eyes, and returning to his grave and formal tones, "is worth naught without a sprig of rosemary; that must you get, and you must place it within the paper in a threefold manner—thus; and then, when Sol and Luna are both in the descendent—but I forget me, the terms of my art are unknown to you; I must speak in the vulgar tongue; and meanwhile you shall see the charm, that there is nothing wicked or dangerous in it, but only the wherewithal to bring about a true lovers' meeting."

He handed her the open piece of paper; but she, having glanced at the writing, gave it him back again.

"I pray you read it to me," she said.

He regarded her for a second with some slight surprise; but he took the paper, and read aloud, slowly, the lines written thereon—

"Dare you haunt our hallowed green?

None but fairies here are seen.

Down and sleep,

Wake and weep,

Pinch him black, and pinch him blue,

That seeks to steal a lover true.

When you come to hear us sing,

Or to tread our fairy ring,

Pinch him black, and pinch him blue—
Oh, thus our nails shall handle you!”

“Why, ’tis like what my father wrote about Herne the Hunter,” said she, with a touch of indifference; perhaps she had expected to hear something more weird and unholy.

“Please you, forget not the rosemary; nothing will come of it else,” he continued. “Then this you must take in your hand secretly, and when no one has knowledge of your outgoing; and when Luna—nay, but I mean when the moon has risen to-night so that, standing in the churchyard, you shall see it over the roof of the church, then must you go to the yew-tree that is in the middle of the churchyard, and there you shall scrape away a little of the earth from near the foot of the tree, and bury this paper, and put the earth firmly down on it again, saying thrice, *Hieronymo! Hieronymo! Hieronymo!* You follow me, sweet lady?”

“’Tis simple enough,” said she, “but that on these fine evenings the people are everywhere about; and if one were to be seen conjuring in the churchyard——”

“You must watch your opportunity, my daughter,” said he, speaking with an increased assumption of authority. “One minute will serve you; and this is all that needs be done.”

“Truly? Is this all?” said she, and she laughed lightly. “Then will my gallant, my pride o’ the world, my lord and master, forthwith spring out of the solid ground? God mend me, but that were a

fearful meeting—in a churchyard! Gentle wizard, I pray you——”

“Not so,” he answered, interrupting her. “The charm will work there; you must let it rest; the night dews shall nourish it; the slow hours shall pass over it; and the spirits that haunt these precincts must know of it, that they may prepare the meeting. To-night, then, sweet lady, you shall place this charm in the churchyard at the foot of the yew-tree, and to-morrow at twelve of the clock——”

“By your leave, not to-morrow,” said she, peremptorily. “Not to-morrow, good wizard; for my father comes home to-morrow; and, by my life, I would not miss the going forth to meet him for all the lovers between here and London town!”

“Your father comes home to-morrow, Mistress Judith?” said he, in somewhat startled accents.

“In truth he does; and Master Tyler also, and Julius Shawe—there will be a goodly company, I warrant you, come riding to-morrow through Shipston and Tredington and Alderminster; and by your leave, reverend sir, the magic must wait.”

“That were easily done,” he answered, after a moment’s thought, “by the alteration of a sign, if the day following might find you at liberty. Will it so, gracious lady?”

“The day after? At what time of the day?” she asked.

“The alteration of the sign will make it but an hour earlier, if I mistake not; that is to say, at eleven of the forenoon you must be at the appointed place——”

"Where, good wizard?" said she—"where am I to see the wraith, the ghost, the phantom husband that is to own me?"

"That know I not myself as yet; but my aids and familiars will try to discover it for me," he answered, taking a small sun-dial out of his pocket, and adjusting it as he spoke.

"And with haste, so please you, good sir," said she, "for I would not that any chance comer had a tale of this meeting to carry back to the gossips."

He stooped down and placed the sun-dial carefully on the ground, at a spot where the young corn was but scant enough on the dry red soil, and then with his forefinger he traced two or three lines and a semicircle on the crumbling earth.

"South by west," said he, and he muttered some words to himself. Then he looked up. "Know you the road to Bidford, sweet lady?"

"As well as I know my own ten fingers," she answered.

"For myself, I know it not, but if my art is not misleading there should be, about a mile or more along that road, another road at right angles with it, bearing to the right, and there at the junction should stand a cross of stone. Is it so?"

"'Tis the lane that leads to Shottery; well I know it," she said.

"So it has been appointed, then," said he, "if the stars continue their protection over you. The day after to-morrow, at eleven of the forenoon, if you be within stone's throw of the cross at the junction of the roads, there shall you see, or my art is

strangely mistaken, the man or gentleman—nay, I know not whether he be parson or layman, soldier or merchant, knight of the shire or plain goodman Dick—I say there shall you see him that is to win you and wear you; but at what time you shall become his wife, and where, and in what circumstances, I cannot reveal to you. I have done my last endeavour.”

“Nay, do not hold me ungrateful,” she said, though there was a smile on her lips, “but surely, good sir, what your skill has done that it can also undo. If it have power to raise a ghost, surely it has power to lay him. And truly, if he be a ghost, I will not have him. And if he be a man, and have a red beard, I will not have him. And if he be a slape-face, I will have none of him. And if he have thin legs, he may walk his ways for me. Good wizard, if I like him not, you must undo the charm.”

“My daughter, you have a light heart,” said he, gravely. “May the favouring planets grant it lead you not into mischief; there be unseen powers that are revengeful. And now I must take my leave, gracious lady. I have given you the result of much study and labour, of much solitary communion with the heavenly bodies; take it, and use it with heed, and so fare you well.”

He was going, but she detained him.

“Good sir, I am your debtor,” said she, with the red blood mantling in her forehead, for all through this interview she had clearly recognised that she was not dealing with any ordinary mendicant for-

tune-teller. "So much labour and skill I cannot accept from you without becoming a beggar. I pray you——"

He put up his hand.

"Not so," said he, with a certain grave dignity. "To have set eyes on the fairest maid in Warwickshire—as I have heard you named—were surely sufficient recompense for any trouble; and to have had speech of you, sweet lady, is what many a one would venture much for. But I would humbly kiss your hand; and so again fare you well."

"God shield you, most courteous wizard, and good-day," said she, as he left; and for a second she stood looking after him in a kind of wonder, for this extraordinary courtesy and dignity of manner were certainly not what she had expected to find in a vagabond purveyor of magic. But now he was gone, and she held the charm in her hand, and so without further ado she set out for home again, getting down through the brushwood to the winding path.

She walked quickly, for she had heard that Master Bushell's daughter, who was to be married that day, meant to beg a general holiday for the schoolboys; and she knew that if this were granted these sharp-eyed young imps would soon be here, there, and everywhere, and certain to spy out the wizard if he were in the neighbourhood. But when she had got clear of this hanging copse, that is known as the Wier Brake, and had reached the open meadows, so that from any part around she could be seen to be alone, she had nothing further

to fear, and she returned to her leisurely straying in quest of flowers. The sun was hotter on the grass now; but the swallows were busy as ever over the stream; and the great bees hummed loud as they went past; and here and there a white butterfly fluttered from petal to petal; and, far away, she could hear the sound of children's voices in the stillness. She was in a gay mood. The interview she had just had with one in league with the occult powers of magic and witchery did not seem in the least to have overawed her. Perhaps, indeed, she had not yet made up her mind to try the potent charm that she had obtained; at all events the question did not weigh heavily on her. For now it was—

“Oh, mistress mine, where are you roaming?”

and again it was—

“For a morn in spring is the sweetest thing
Cometh in all the year!”

and always another touch of colour added to the daintily-arranged nosegay in her hand. And then, of a sudden, as she chanced to look ahead, she observed a number of the schoolboys come swarming down to the foot-bridge; and she knew right well that one of them—to wit, young Willie Hart—would think a holiday quite thrown away and wasted if he did not manage to seek out and secure the company of his pretty cousin Judith.

“Ah! there, now,” she was saying to herself, as she watched the schoolboys come over the bridge one by one and two by two, “there, now, is my sweetheart of sweethearts; there is my prince of

lovers! If ever I have lover as faithful and kind as he, it will go well. 'Nay, Susan,' says he, 'I love you not; you kiss me hard, and speak to me as if I were still a child; I love Judith better.' And how cruel of my father to put him in the play, and to slay him so soon; but perchance he will call him to life again—nay, it is a favourite way with him to do that; and pray Heaven he brings home with him to-morrow the rest of the story, that Prue may read it to me. And so are you there, among the unruly imps, you young Prince Mamillius? Have you caught sight of me yet, sweetheart blue-eyes? Why, come, then; you will outstrip them all, I know, when you get sight of Cousin Judith; for as far off as you are, you will reach me first, that I am sure of; and then, by my life, sweetheart Willie, you shall have a kiss as soft as a dove's breast!"

And so she went on to meet them, arranging the colours of her straggling blossoms the while with now and again a snatch of careless song—

“Come, blow thy horn, hunter!
Come, blow thy horn, hunter!
Come, blow thy horn—jolly hunter!”

CHAPTER II.

SIGNIOR CRAB-APPLE.

THERE was much ado in the house all that day, in view of the home-coming on the morrow, and it was not till pretty late in the evening that Judith was free to steal out for a gossip with her friend and chief companion, Prudence Shawe. She had not far to go—but a couple of doors off, in fact; and her coming was observed by Prudence herself, who happened to be sitting at the casemented window for the better prosecution of her needle-work, there being still a clear glow of twilight in the sky. A minute or so thereafter the two friends were in Prudence's own chamber, which was on the first floor, and looking out to the back over barns and orchards; and they had gone to the window, to the bench there, to have their secrets together. This Prudence Shawe was some two years Judith's junior—though she really played the part of elder sister to her; she was of a pale complexion, with light straw-coloured hair; not very pretty, perhaps, but she had a restful kind of face that invited friendliness and sympathy, of which she had a large abundance to give in return. Her costume was of a Puritanical plainness and primness, both in the fashion of it and in its severe avoidance of colour;

and that was not the only point on which she formed a marked contrast to this dear cousin and wilful gossip of hers, who had a way of pleasing herself (more especially if she thought she might thereby catch her father's eye) in apparel as in most other things. And on this occasion—at the outset at all events—Judith would not have a word said about the assignation of the morning. The wizard was dismissed from her mind altogether. It was about the home-coming of the next day that she was all eagerness and excitement; and her chief prayer and entreaty was that her friend Prudence should go with her to welcome the travellers home.

“Nay, but you must and shall, dear Prue; sweet mouse, I beg it of you!” she was urging. “Every one at New Place is so busy that they have fixed upon Signior Crab-apple to ride with me; and you know I cannot suffer him; and I shall not have a word of my father all the way back, not a word; there will be nothing but a discourse about fools, and idle jests, and wiseman Matthew the hero of the day——”

“Dear Judith, I cannot understand how you dislike the old man so,” her companion said, in that smooth voice of hers. “I see no garden that is better tended than yours.”

“I would I could let slip the mastiff at his unmannerly throat!” was the quick reply—and indeed for a second she looked as if she would fain have seen that wish fulfilled. “The vanity of him!—the puffed-up pride of him!—he thinks there be none in Warwickshire but himself wise enough to talk to

my father; and the way he dogs his steps if he be walking in the garden—no one else may have a word with him—sure my father is sufficiently driven forth by the preachers and the psalm-singing within-doors, that out-of-doors, in his own garden, he might have some freedom of speech with his own daughter——”

“Judith, Judith,” her friend said, and she put her hand on her arm, “you have such wilful thoughts, and wild words, too. I am sure your father is free of speech with every one—gentle and simple, old and young, it matters not who it is that approaches him.”

“This Signior Crab-apple truly!” the other exclaimed, in the impetuosity of her scorn. “If his heart be as big as a crab-apple, I greatly doubt; but that it is of like quality I’ll be sworn. And the bitterness of his railing tongue! All women are fools—vools he calls them, rather—first and foremost; and most men are fools; but of all fools there be none like the fools of Warwickshire—that is, because my worshipful goodman gardener comes all the way from Bewdley. ’Tis meat and drink to him, he says, to discover a fool, though how he should have any difficulty in the discovering, seeing that we are all of us fools, passes my understanding. Nay, but I know what set him after that quarry; ’twas one day in the garden, and my father was just come home from London, and he was talking to my uncle Gilbert, and was laughing at what his friend Benjamin Jonson had said, or had written, I know not which. ‘Of all beasts in the world,’ says

he, 'I love most the serious ass.' Then up steps Goodman Matthew. 'There be plenty of 'em about 'ere, zur,' says he, with a grin on his face like that on a cat when a dog has her by the tail. And my father, who will talk to any one, as you say truly, and about anything, and always with the same attention, must needs begin to challenge Goodman Crab-apple to declare the greatest fools that ever he had met with; and from that day to this the ancient sour-face hath been on the watch—and it suits well with his opinion of other people and his opinion of himself as the only wise man in the world—I say ever since he hath been on the watch for fools; and the greater the fool the greater his wisdom, I reckon, that can find him out. A purveyor of fools!—a goodly trade! I doubt not but that it likes him better than the tending of apricots when he has the free range of the ale-houses to work on. He will bring a couple of them into the garden when my father is in the summer-house. 'Ere, zur, please you come out and look 'ere, zur; 'ere be a brace of rare vools.' And the poor clowns are proud of it; they stand and look at each other and laugh. 'We be, zur—we be.' And then my father will say no, and will talk with them, and cheer them with assurance of their wisdom; then must they have spiced bread and ale ere they depart; and this is a triumph for Master Matthew—the withered, shrivelled, dried-up, cankered nutshell that he is!"

"Dear Judith, pray have patience—indeed, you are merely jealous."

"Jealous!" she exclaimed, as if her scorn of this ill-conditioned old man put that well out of the question.

"You think he has too much of your father's company, and you like it not; but consider of it, Judith, he being in the garden, and your father in the summer-house, and when your father is tired for the moment of his occupation, whatever that may be, then can he step out and speak to this goodman Matthew, that amuses him with his biting tongue, and with the self-sufficiency of his wisdom—nay, I suspect your father holds him to be a greater fool than any he makes sport of, and that he loves to lead him on."

"And why should my father have to be in the summer-house but that in-doors the wool-spinning is hardly more constant than the lecturing and the singing of psalms and hymns?"

"Judith! Judith!" said her gentle friend, with real trouble on her face, "you grieve me when you talk like that—indeed you do, sweetheart! There is not a morning nor a night passes that I do not pray the Lord that your heart may be softened and led to our ways—nay, far from that, but to the Lord's own ways; and the answer will come; I have faith; I know it—and God send it speedily, for you are like an own sister to me, and my heart yearns over you."

The other sat silent for a second. She could not fail to be touched by the obvious sincerity, the longing kindness of her friend, but she would not confess as much in words.

"As yet, sweet Prue," said she, lightly, "I suppose I am of the unregenerate, and if it is wicked to cherish evil thoughts of your neighbour, then am I not of the elect, for I heartily wish that Tom Quiney and some of the youths would give Matthew gardener a sound ducking in a horse-pond to tame his arrogance withal. But no matter. What say you, dear Prue? Will you go with me to-morrow, so that we may have the lad Tookey in charge of us, and Signior Crab-apple be left to his weeding and graffing and railing at human kind? Do, now——"

"The maids are busy, Judith," said she, doubtfully.

"But a single day, sweetheart!" she urged. "And if we go early we may get as far as Shipston and await them there. Have you no desire to meet your brother, Prudence—to be the first of all to welcome him home? Nay, that is because you can have him in your company as often as you wish; there is no goodman-wiseman-fool to come between you."

"Dear heart," said Prudence Shawe, with a smile, "I know not what is the witchery of you, but there is none I wot of that can say you nay."

"You will, then?" said the other, joyfully. "Ah, look now, the long ride home we shall have with my father, and all the news I shall have to tell him! And all good news, Prue; scarcely a whit or bit that is not good news: the roan that he bought at Evesham is well of her lameness—good; and the King's mulberry is thriving bravely (I wonder that wiseman Matthew has not done it a mischief in the

night-time, for the King, being above him in station, must needs have nothing from him but sour and envious words); and then the twenty acres that my father so set his heart upon he is to have—I hear that the Combes have said as much, and my father will be right well pleased; and the vicar is talking no longer of building the new piggery over against the garden—at least for the present there is nothing to be done: all good news; but there is better still, as you know; for what will he say when he discovers that I have taught Bess Hall to ride the mastiff?”

“Pray you have a care, dear Judith,” said her friend, with some apprehension on her face. “’Tis a dangerous-looking beast.”

“A lamb, a very lamb!” was the confident answer. “Well, now, and as we are riding home he will tell me of all the things he has brought from London; and you know he has always something pretty for you, sweet Puritan, though you regard such adornments as snares and pitfalls. And this time I hope it will be a silver brooch for you, that so you must needs wear it and show it, or he will mark its absence; and for the others let us guess; let us see. There may be some more of that strange-fashioned Murana glass for Susan, for as difficult as it is to carry; and some silk hangings or the like for my mother, or store of napery, perchance, which she prizeth more; and be sure there is the newest book of sermons from Paul’s Churchyard for the Doctor; a grey-hound, should he hear of a famous one on the way, for Thomas Combe; toys for the little Harts, that is certain; for my aunt Joan—

what?—a silver-topped jug, or some perfumes of musk and civet?—and what else—and for whom else—well——”

“But what for yourself, dear Judith?” her friend said, with a smile. “Will he forget you? Has Matthew gardener driven you out even from his recollection? Will he not have for you a pretty pair of rose shoe-strings, or one of the new tasselled French hoods they are speaking of, or something of the kind, that will turn the heads of all the lads in Stratford twice further round? You are a temptress surely, sweetheart; I half forget that such vanities should displease me when I see the way you wear them; and that I think you must take from your father, Judith; for no matter how plain his apparel is—and it is plain indeed for one that owns the New Place—he wears it with such an ease and with such a grace and simplicity that you would say a prince should wear it even so.”

“You put me off, Prue,” her friend said, with a sort of good-natured impatience. “Why, I was showing you what nicelings and delicates my father was bringing, and what I had thought to say was this: that he may have this for one, and that for the other, and many a one proud to be remembered (as I shall be if he thinks of me), but this that I know he is bringing for little Bess Hall is something worth all of these, for it is nothing less than the whole love of his heart. Nay, but I swear it; there is not a human creature in the world to compare with her in his eyes; she is the pearl that he wears in his heart of hearts. If it were London town she wanted,

and he could give it to her, that is what he would bring for her."

"What! are you jealous of her too?" said Prudence, with her placid smile.

"By yea and nay, sweet Puritan, if that will content you, I declare it is not so," was the quick answer. "Why, Bess is my ally! We are in league, I tell you; we will have a tussle with the enemy ere long; and, by my life, I think I know that that will put goodman-wiseman's nose awry!"

At this moment the secret confabulation of these two friends was suddenly and unexpectedly broken in upon by a message from without. Something white came fluttering through the open casement, and fell, not quite into Judith's lap, which was probably its intended destination, but down toward her feet. She stooped and picked it up; it was a letter, addressed to her, and tied round with a bit of rose-red silk ribbon that was neatly formed into a true lover's knot.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLANTING OF THE CHARM.

THE embarrassment that ensued—on her part only, for the pale and gentle face of her friend betrayed not even so much as surprise—was due to several causes. Judith could neither read nor write. In her earlier years she had been a somewhat delicate child, and had consequently been excused from the ordinary tuition, slight as that usually was in the case of girls; but when, later on, she grew into quite firm and robust health, in her wilfulness and pride and petulance she refused to re-transform herself into a child and submit to be taught children's lessons. Moreover, she had an acute and alert brain; and she had a hundred reasons ready to show that what was in reality a mere waywardness on her part was the most wise and natural thing in the world; while her father, who had a great and habitual tolerance for everything and everybody that came within his reach, laughed with her rather than at her, and said she should do very well without book-learning so long as those pink roses shone in her cheeks. But she had one reason that was not merely an excuse. Most of the printed matter that reached the house was brought thither by this or that curate, or by this or that famous preacher, who,

in going through the country, was sure of an eager and respectful welcome at New Place; and perhaps it was not kindly nor civilly done of them—though it may have been regarded as a matter of conscience—that they should carry thither and read aloud, amongst other things, the fierce denunciations of stage-plays and stage-players which were common in the polemical and puritanical literature of the day. Right or wrong, Judith resented this with a vehement indignation; and she put a ban upon all books, judging by what she had heard read out of some; nay, one day she had come into the house and found her elder sister, who was not then married, greatly distressed, and even in the bitterness of tears; and when she discovered that the cause of this was a pamphlet that had been given to Susanna, in which not only were the heinous wickednesses of plays and players denounced, but also her own father named by his proper name, Judith, with hot cheeks and flashing eyes, snatched the pamphlet from her sister's hand and forthwith sent it flying through the open window into the mud without, notwithstanding that books and pamphlets were scarce and valuable things, and that this one had been lent. And when she discovered that this piece of writing had been brought to the house by the pious and learned Walter Blaise—a youthful divine he was who had a small living some few miles from Stratford, but who lived in the town, and was one of the most eager and disputatious of the Puritanical preachers there—it in no way mitigated her wrath that this worthy Master Blaise was re-

garded by many, and even openly spoken of, as a suitor for her own hand.

"God mend me," said she, in her anger (and greatly to the distress of the mild-spoken Prudence), "but 'tis a strange way of paying court to a young woman to bring into the house abuse of her own father! Sir Parson may go hang for me!" And for many a day she would have nothing to say to him; and steeled and hardened her heart not only against him, but against the doctrines and ways of conduct that he so zealously advocated; and she would not come in to evening prayers when he happened to be present; and wild horses would not have dragged her to the parish church on the Sunday afternoon that it was his turn to deliver the fortnightly lecture there. However, these things abated in time. Master Walter Blaise was a civil-spoken and an earnest and sincere young man, and Prudence Shawe was the gentle intermediary. Judith suffered his presence, and that was about all as yet; but she would not look the way of printed books. And when Prudence tried to entice her into a study of the mere rudiments of reading and writing, she would refuse peremptorily, and say, with a laugh, that, could she read, the first thing she should read would be plays, which, as sweet cousin Prue was aware, were full of tribulation and anguish, and fit only for the foolish Galatians of the world, the children of darkness and the devil. But this obstinacy did not prevent her overcoming her dear cousin Prue's scruples, and getting her to read aloud to her in the privacy of their secret haunts this or

the other fragment of a play, when that she had adroitly purloined a manuscript from the summer-house in New Place; and in this surreptitious manner she had acquired a knowledge of what was going on at the Globe and the Blackfriars theatres in London, which, had they but guessed of it, would have considerably astounded her mother, her sister, and good Parson Blaise as well.

In more delicate matters still, Prudence was her confidante, her intermediary, and amanuensis; and ordinarily this caused her no embarrassment, for she wished for no secrets with any of human kind. But in one direction she had formed certain suspicions; and so it was that on this occasion, when she stooped down and picked up the letter that had been so deftly thrown in at the casement, her face flushed somewhat.

"I know from whom it comes," said she, and she seemed inclined to put it into the little wallet of blue satin that hung at her side.

Then she glanced at Prudence's eyes. There was nothing there in the least approaching displeasure or pique, only a quiet amusement.

"It was cleverly done," said Prudence, and she raised her head cautiously and peeped through one of the small panes of pale green glass. But the twilight had sunk into dusk, and any one outside could easily have made his escape unperceived through the labyrinth of barns and out-houses.

Judith glanced at the handwriting again, and said, with an affectation of carelessness—

"There be those who have plenty of time, surely,

for showing the wonders of their skill. Look at the twisting and turning and lattice-work of it—truly he is a most notable clerk; I would he spent the daylight to better purpose. Read it for me, sweet Prue.”

She would have handed the letter—with much studied indifference of look and manner—to her friend, but that Prudence gently refused it.

“’Tis you must undo the string; you know not what may be inside.”

So Judith herself opened the letter, which contained merely a sprig of rosemary, along with some lines written in a most ornate caligraphy.

“What does he say?” she asked, but without any apparent interest, as she gave the open letter to her companion.

Prudence took the letter and read aloud—

“‘Rosemary is for remembrance
Between us day and night;
Wishing that I might always have
You present in my sight.’

This from your true well-wisher and one that would be your loving servant unto death, T. Q.”

“The idle boy!” she said, and again she directed a quick and penetrating look of inquiry to her friend’s face; but Prudence was merely regarding the elaborate handwriting. There was no trace of wounded pride or anything of the kind in her eyes; nay, she looked up and said, with a smile—

“For one that can wrestle so well, and play at football, and throw the sledge as they say he can, he is master of a most delicate handwriting.”

"But the rosemary, Prue," Judith exclaimed suddenly, and she groped about at her feet until she had found it. "Why, now, look you, was ever anything so fortunate? Truly I had forgotten all about rosemary, and my reverend wizard, and the charm that is to be buried to-night; and you know not a word of the story. Shall I tell you, sweet mouse? Is there time before the moon appears over the roof of the church?—for there I am summoned to fearful deeds. Why, Prue, you look as frightened as if a ghost had come into the room—you yourself are like a ghost now in the dusk—or is it the coming moonlight that is making you so pale?"

"I had thought that better counsels would have prevailed with you, Judith," she said, anxiously. "I knew not you had gone to see the man, and I reproach myself that I have been an agent in the matter."

"A mouthpiece only, sweet Prue!—a mere harmless, innocent whistle that had nothing to do with the tune. And the business was not so dreadful either; there was no cauldron nor playing with snakes and newts, no, nor whining for money, which I expected most; but a most civil and courteous wizard, a most town-bred wizard as ever the sun set eye on, that called me 'gracious lady' every other moment, and would not take a penny for his pains. Marry, if all the powers of evil be as well-behaved, I shall have less fear of them; for a more civil-spoken gentleman I have never encountered; and 'sweet lady' it was, and 'gracious lady,' and a

voice like the voice of my lord bishop; and the assurance that the planets and the stars were holding me in their kindest protection; and a promise of a ghost husband that is to appear that I may judge whether I like him or like him not; and all this and more—and he would kiss my hand, and so farewell, and the reverend magician makes his obeisance and vanishes, and I am not a penny the poorer, but only the richer because of my charm! There, I will show it to you, cousin.”

After a little search she found the tiny document; and Prudence Shawe glanced over it.

“Judith! Judith!” said she, almost in despair, “I know not whither your wilfulness will carry you. But tell me what happened. How came you by this paper? And what ghost husband do you speak of?”

Then Judith related, with much circumstantiality, what had occurred that morning; not toning it down in the least, but rather exaggerating here and there; for she was merry-hearted, and she liked to see the sweet Puritan face grow more and more concerned. Moreover, the dull gray light outside, instead of deepening into dark, appeared to be becoming a trifle clearer, so that doubtless the moon was declaring itself somewhere; and she was looking forward, when the time came, to securing Prudence’s company as far as the churchyard, if her powers of persuasion were equal to that.

“But you will not go—surely you will not go, darling Judith,” said Prudence, in accents of quite pathetic entreaty. “You know the sin of dealing

with such ungodly practices—nay, and the danger, too, for you would of your own free will go and seek a meeting with unholy things, whereas I have been told that not so long ago they used in places to carry a pan of frankincense round the house each night to keep away witchcraft from them as they slept. I beseech you, dearest Judith, give me the paper, and I will burn it!”

“Nay, nay, it is but an idle tale, a jest; I trust it not,” said her friend to reassure her. “Be not afraid, sweet Prue. Those people who go about compelling the planets and summoning spirits and the like have lesser power than the village folk imagine, else would their own affairs thrive better than they seem to do.”

“Then give me the paper; let me burn it, Judith!”

“Nay, nay, mouse,” said she, withholding it; and then she added, with a sort of grave merriment or mischief in her face: “Whether the thing be aught or naught, sure I cannot treat so ill my courteous wizard? He was no goose-herd, I tell you, but a most proper and learned man; and he must have the chance of working the wonders he foretold. Come now, think of it with reason, dear Prue. If there be no power in the charm if I go to Shottery for my morning walk and find no one in the lane, who is harmed? Why, no one; and Grandmother Hathaway is pleased, and will show me how her garden is growing. Then, on the other hand, should the charm work, should there be some one there, what evil if I regard him as I pass

from the other side of the way? Is it such a wonder that one should meet a stranger on the Bidford road? And what more? Man or ghost, he cannot make me marry him if I will not. He cannot make me speak to him if I will not. And if he would put a hand on me, I reckon Roderigo would speedily have him by the throat, as I hope he may some day have goodman Matthew."

"But, Judith, such things are unlawful and forbidden——"

"To you, sweet saint—to you," said the other, with much good humour. "But I have not learned to put aside childish things as yet; and this is only a jest, good Prue; and you, that are so faithful to your word, even in the smallest trifle, would not have me break my promise to my gentle wizard? 'Gracious lady,' he says, and 'sweet lady,' as if I were a dame of the court; it were unmannerly of me not to grant him this small demand——"

"I wish I had misread the letter," said Prudence, so occupied with her own fears that she scarcely knew what to do.

"What!" exclaimed her friend, in tones of railery; "you would have deceived me? Is this your honesty, your singleness of heart, sweet Puritan? You would have sent me on some fool's errand, would you?"

"And if it were to be known you had gone out to meet this conjurer, Judith, what would your mother and sister say?—and your father?"

"My mother and sister—hum!" was the demure reply. "If he had but come in the garb of a

preacher, with a Bible under one arm and a prayer-book under the other, I doubt not that he would have been welcome enough at New Place—ay, and everything in the house set before him, and a Flanders jug full of Quiney's best claret withal to cheer the good man. But when you speak of my father, dear Prue, there you are wide of the mark—wide, wide of the mark; for the wizard is just such an one as he would be anxious to know and see for himself. Indeed, if my mother and Susan would have the house filled with preachers, my father would rather seek his company from any strange kind of vragrant cattle you could find on the road—ballad-singers, strolling players, peddlers, and the like; and you should see him when some ancient harper in his coat of green comes near the town—nay, the constable shall not interfere with him, license or no license; my father must needs entertain him in the garden; and he will sit and talk to the old man; and the best in the house must be brought out for him; and whether he try his palsied fingers on the strings, or perchance attempt a verse of 'Pastime with good company,' with his quavering old voice—that is according to his own good will and pleasure; nothing is demanded of him, but that he have good cheer, and plenty of it, and go on his way the merrier, with a groat or two in his pouch. Nay, I mind me, when Susan was remonstrating with my father about such things, and bidding him have some regard for the family name—'What?' says he, laughing; 'set you up, Madam Pride! Know you not, then, whence comes

our name? And yet 'tis plain enough. *Shacks*, these are but vagrant, idle, useless fellows; and then we come to *pere*, that is, an equal and companion. There you have it complete—*Shackspere*, the companion of strollers and vagabonds, of worthless and idle fellows. What say you, Madam Pride? And, indeed, poor Susan was sorely displeased, in-somuch that I said, 'But the spear in the coat of arms, father—how came we by that?'—'Why, there, now,' says he, 'you see how regardless the heralds are of the King's English. I warrant me they would give a ship to Shipston and a hen to Enstone.' Indeed, he will jest you out of anything. When your brother would have left the Town Council, Prue——"

But here she seemed suddenly to recollect herself. She rose quickly, thrust open the casement still wider, and put out her head to discover whereabouts the moon was; and when she withdrew her head again there was mischief and a spice of excitement in her face.

"No more talking and gossip now, Prue; the time has arrived for fearful deeds."

Prudence put her small white hand on her friend's arm.

"Stay, Judith. Be guided—for the love of me be guided, sweetheart! You know not what you do. The profaning of sacred places will bring a punishment."

"Profaning, say you, sweet mouse? Is it anything worse than the children playing tick round the

grave-stones; or even, when no one is looking, having a game of 'King by your leave'?"

"It is late, Judith. It must be nine o'clock. It is not seemly that a young maiden should be out-of-doors alone at such an hour of the night."

"Marry, that say I," was the light answer. "And the better reason that you should come with me, Prue."

"I?" said Prudence, in affright.

"Wherefore not, then? Nay, but you shall suffer no harm through the witchery, good cousin; I ask your company no farther than the little swing gate. One minute there, and I shall be back with you. Come now, for your friend's sake; get your hood and your muffler, dear Prue, and no one shall know either of us from the witch of Endor, so quickly shall we be there and back."

Still she hesitated.

"If your mother were to know, Judith——"

"To know what, sweetheart? That you walked with me as far as the church and back again? Why, on such a fine and summer-like night I dare be sworn now that half the good folk of Stratford are abroad; and it is no such journey into a far country that we should take one of the maids with us. Nay, come, sweet Prue? We shall have a merry ride to-morrow; to-night, for your friendship's sake, you must do me this small service."

Prudence did not answer; but somewhat thoughtfully, and even reluctantly, she went to a small cupboard of boxes that stood in the corner of the apartment, and brought forth some articles of attire

which (although she might not have confessed it) were mostly for the better disguising of herself, seeing that the night was fine and warm; and then Judith, having also drawn a muffler loosely round her neck and the lower half of her face, was ready to go—and was gone, in fact, as far as the door, when she suddenly said:

“Why, now, I had nearly forgot the rosemary, and without that the charm is naught. Did I leave it on the window-shelf?”

She went back and found it, and this time she took the precaution of folding it within the piece of paper that she was to bury in the churchyard.

“Is it fair, dear Judith?” Prudence said, reproachfully, before she opened the door—“is it right that you should take the bit of rosemary sent you by one lover and use it as a charm to bring another?”

“Nay, why should you concern yourself, good cousin?” said Judith, with a quick glance; but indeed, at this end of the room, it was too dark for her to see anything. “My lover, say you? Let that be as the future may show. In the meantime I am pledged to no one, nor anxious that I should be so. And a scrap of rosemary, now, what is it? But listen to this, dear Prue: if it help to show me the man I shall marry—if there be aught in this magic—will it not be better for him that sent the rosemary that we should be aware of what is in store for us?”

“I know not—I scarcely ever know—whether you are in jest or in earnest, Judith,” her friend said.

"Why, then, I am partly in starched cambric, good mouse, if you must know, and partly in damask, and partly in taffeta of popinjay blue. But come now, let us be going; the awful hour approaches, Prue. Do you not tremble, like Faustus in the cell? What was't he said?—

'It strikes; it strikes. Now, body, turn to air!'

Come along, sweet Prue."

But she was silent as they left. Indeed, they went down the dark little staircase and out at the front door with as little noise as might be. Judith had not been mistaken: the fine, clear, warm evening had brought out many people; and they were either quietly walking home or standing in dusky little groups at the street corners talking to each other; whilst here and there came a laugh from a ruddy-windowed ale-house; and here and there a hushed sound of singing, where a casement had been left a bit open, told that the family within were at their devotional exercises for the night. The half-moon was now clear and silvery in the heavens. As they passed under the massive structure of the Guild Chapel the upper portions of the tall windows had a pale greenish glow shining through them that made the surrounding shadows look all the more solemn. Whether it was that their mufflers effectually prevented their being recognised, or whether it was that none of their friends happened to be abroad, they passed along without attracting notice from any one; nor was a word spoken between themselves for some time.

But when they drew near to the church, the vast bulk of which, towering above the trees around, seemed almost black against the palely clear sky, the faithful Prudence made bold to put in a final word of remonstrance and dissuasion.

"It is wickedness and folly, Judith. Naught can come of such work," she said.

"Then let naught come of it, and what harm is done?" her companion said gaily. "Dear mouse, are you so timorous? Nay, but you shall not come within the little gate; you shall remain without. And if the spirits come and snatch me, as they snatched off Doctor Faustus, you shall see all the pageant, and not a penny to pay. What was it in the paper?—

‘Pinch him black, and pinch him blue,
That seeks to steal a lover true,’

Did it not run so? But they cannot pinch you, dear Prue; so stand here now, and hush!—pray you do not scream if you see them whip me off in a cloud of fire—and I shall be with you again in a minute."

She passed through the little swinging gate and entered the churchyard, casting therewith a quick glance around. Apparently no one was within sight of her, either among the gray stones or under the black-stemmed elms by the river; but there were people not far off, for she could hear their voices—doubtless they were going home through the meadows on the other side of the stream. She looked but once in that direction. The open country was lying pale and clear in the white light; and under the

wide branches of the elms one or two bats were silently darting to and fro; but she could not see the people, and she took it for granted that no one could now observe what she was about. So she left the path, made her way through the noiseless grass, and reached the small yew-tree standing there among the grave-stones. The light was clear enough to allow her to open the package and make sure that the sprig of rosemary was within; then she rapidly, with her bare hand, stooped down and scooped a little of the earth away; she embedded the packet there, repeating meanwhile the magic words; she replaced the earth and brushed the long grass over it, so that, indeed, as well as she could make out, the spot looked as if it had not been disturbed in any manner. And then, with a quick look toward the roof of the church to satisfy herself that all the conditions had been fulfilled, she got swiftly back to the path again, and so to the little gate, passing through the churchyard like a ghost.

“The deed is done, good Prue,” said she gaily, but in a tragic whisper, as she linked her arm within the arm of her friend and set out homeward. “Now are the dark powers of the earth at league to raise me up—what think you, sweetheart?—such a gallant as the world ne’er saw! Ah! now, when you see him come riding in from Shottery, will not the town stare? None of your logget-playing, tavern-jesting, come-kiss-me-Moll lovers, but a true-sworn knight on his white war steed, in shining mail, with a golden casque on his head and ostrich feathers, and on his silver shield ‘St. George and England!’ ”

“You are light-hearted, Judith,” said the timid and gentle-voiced Puritan by her side; “and in truth there is nothing that you fear. Well, I know not, but it will be in my prayers that no harm come of this night.”

CHAPTER IV.

A PAGEANT.

ON the morning after the arrival of Judith's father he was out and abroad with his bailiff at an early hour, so that she had no chance of speaking to him; and when he returned to New Place he went into the summer-house in the orchard, where it was the general habit and custom to leave him undisturbed. And yet she only wished to ask permission to take the mastiff with her as far as Shottery; and so, when she had performed her share of the domestic duties, and got herself ready, she went out and through the back court and into the garden, thinking that he would not mind so brief an interruption.

It was a fresh and pleasant morning, for there had been some rain in the night, and now there was a slight breeze blowing from the south, and the air was sweet with the scent of the lilac bushes. The sun lay warm on the pink and white blossoms of the apple-trees and on the creamy masses of the cherry; martins were skimming and shooting this way and that, with now and again a rapid flight to the eaves of the barn; the bees hummed from flower to flower, and everywhere there was a chirping, and twittering, and clear singing of birds. The world

seemed full of light and colour, of youth, and sweet things, and gladness: on such a morning she had no fear of a refusal, nor was she much afraid to go near the summer-house that the family were accustomed to hold sacred from intrusion.

But when she passed into the orchard, and came in sight of it, there was a sudden flash of anger in her eyes. She might have guessed—she might have known. There, blocking up the doorway of the latticed and green-painted tenement, was the figure of goodman Matthew; and the little bandy-legged pippin-faced gardener was coolly resting on his spade while he addressed his master within. Was there ever (she asked herself) such hardihood, such audacity and impertinence? And then she rapidly bethought her that now was a rare opportunity for putting in practice a scheme of revenge that she had carefully planned. It is true that she might have gone forward and laid her fingers on Matthew's arm (he was rather deaf), and so have motioned him away. But she was too proud to do that. She would dispossess and rout him in another fashion. So she turned and went quickly again into the house.

Now at this time Dr. Hall was making a round of professional visits at some distance away in the country; and on such occasions Susanna Hall and her little daughter generally came to lodge at New Place, where Judith was found to be an eager and assiduous, if somewhat impatient and unreasoning, nurse, playmate, and music-mistress. In fact, the young mother had to remonstrate with her sister, and to point out that, although baby Elizabeth was

a wonder of intelligence and cleverness—indeed, such a wonder as had never hitherto been beheld in the world—still, a child of two years and three months or so could not be expected to learn everything all at once; and that it was just as reasonable to ask her to play on the lute as to imagine that she could sit on the back of Don the mastiff without being held. However, Judith was fond of the child; and that incomparable and astute small person had a great liking for her aunt (in consequence of benefits received), and a trust in her which the wisdom of maturer years might have modified; and so, whenever she chose, Judith found no difficulty in obtaining possession of this precious charge, even the young mother showing no anxiety when she saw the two go away together.

So it was on this particular morning that Judith went and got hold of little Bess Hall, and quickly smartened up her costume, and carried her out into the garden. Then she went to the barn, outside of which was the dog's kennel; she unclasped the chain and set free the huge, slow-stepping, dun-coloured beast, that seemed to know as well as any one what was going forward; she affixed to his collar two pieces of silk ribbon that did very well for reins; and then she placed little Bess Hall on Don Roderigo's back, and gave her the reins to hold, and so they set out for the summer-house.

On that May morning the wide and gracious realm of England—which to some minds, and especially at that particular season of the year, seems the most beautiful country of any in the world—

this rich and variegated England lay basking in the sunlight, with all its lush meadows, and woods, and hedges in the full and fresh luxuriance of the spring; and the small quiet hamlets were busy in a drowsy and easy-going kind of fashion; and far away around the white coasts the blue sea was idly murmuring in; but it may be doubted whether in all the length and breadth of that fair land there was any fairer sight than this that the wit of a young woman had devised. She herself was pleasant enough to look on (and she was always particularly attentive about her attire when her father was at home), and now she was half laughing as she thought of her forthcoming revenge; she had dressed her little niece in her prettiest costume of pink and white, and pink was the colour of the silken reins; while the great slow-footed Don bore his part in the pageant with a noble majesty, sometimes looking up at Judith as if to ask whether he were going in the right direction. And so the procession passed on between the white-laden cherry-trees and the redder masses of the apple-blossom; and the miniature Ariadne, sitting sideways on the back of the great beast, betrayed no fear whatsoever; while her aunt Judith held her, walking by her, and scolding her for that she would not sing.

“Tant sing, Aunt Judith,” said she.

“You can sing well enough, you little goose, if you try,” said her aunt, with the unreasoning impatience of an unmarried young woman. “What is the use of your going hunting without a hunting song? Come along now:

‘The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
And it is well-nigh day.’

Try it, Bess!”

“Hunt is up, hunt is up,” said the small rider; but she was occupied with the reins, and clearly did not want to be bothered.

“No, no, that is not singing, little goose. Why, sing it like this now:

‘The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
And it is well-nigh day;
And Harry our king is gone hunting
To bring his deer to bay!’”

However, the music lesson came to an abrupt end. They had by this time almost reached the summer-house. Saturnine Matthew gardener, who still stood there, blocking up the doorway, had not heard them approach, but his master within had. The next instant Goodman Matthew suddenly found himself discarded, dismissed, and treated, indeed, as if he were simply non-existent in the world; for Judith’s father, having paused for a moment to regard from the doorway the pretty pageant that had been arranged for him (and his face lit up, as it were, with pleasure at the sight), was the next minute down beside his little granddaughter, with one knee on the ground, so that he was just on a level with her outstretched hands.

“What, Bess?” he said, as he caught her by both hands and feet. “You imp, you inch, you elfin queen, you!—would you go a-hunting, then?”

“Send away Don—me want to ride the high

horse," said the small Bess, who had her own ideas as to what was most comfortable and also secure.

"And so you shall, you sprite, you Ariel, you moonlight wonder!" he exclaimed, as he perched her on his shoulder, and rose to his feet again. "The high horse, truly; indeed, you shall ride the high horse! Come now, we will go see how the King's mulberry thrives; that is the only tree we have that is younger than yourself, you ancient, you beldame, you witch of Endor, you!"

"Father," said Judith, seeing that he was going away perfectly regardless of anybody or anything except his granddaughter, "may I take the Don with me for an hour or so?"

"Whither away, wench—whither?" he asked, turning for a moment.

"To Shottery, father."

"Well, well," said he, and he turned again and went off.

"Come, Bess, you world's jewel, you, you shall ride with me to London some day, and tell the King how his mulberry thrives; that shall you, you fairy, you princess, you velvet-footed maidiekin! To London, Bess—to London!"

Judith did not stay to regard them further; but she could not help casting a look before she left at goodman Matthew, who stood there discomfited, dispossessed, unheeded, annihilated, as it were. And then, calling the dog after her, she went in by the back court and through the house again (for Chapel Lane was in a sad condition after the rain of the night, and was not a pleasant pathway even in the

best of times). And she was laughing to herself at Matthew's discomfiture, and she was singing to herself as she went out by the front door—

“There's never a maid in all the town,
But well she knows that malt's come down.”

And in the street it was “Good-morrow to you, Master Jelleyman; the rain will do good, will it not?” and again, “Give ye good-morrow, Neighbour Pike; do you know that my father is come home?” and again, “Get you within the doorway, little Parsons, else the waggon-wheels will be over thee.” And then, when she was in the freedom of the fields, she would talk blithely to Don Roderigo, or snatch a buttercup here or three from among the long, lush, warm grass, or return to her careless singing:

“For malt's come down, and malt's come down—
O well she knows that malt's come down!”

CHAPTER V.

IN A WOODED LANE.

Now it would be extremely difficult to say with what measure of faith or scepticism, of expectation or mere curiosity, she was now proceeding through these meadows to the spot indicated to her by the wizard. Probably she could not have told herself; for what was really uppermost in her mind was a kind of malicious desire to frighten her timid Puritan friend with the wildness of such an adventure. And then she was pretty safe. Ostensibly she was going to Shottery to pay a visit to her grandmother; to look at the pansies, the wall-flowers, the forget-me-nots in the little garden, and see how the currants and raspberries were getting on. She could hardly expect a ghost to rise from the ground in broad daylight. And if any mere strangers happened to be coming along the lane leading in from the Bidford road, Don Roderigo was a sufficient guardian. On the other hand, if there was anything real and of verity in this witchcraft—which had sought her, and not she it—was it not possible that the wizard might on one point have been mistaken? If her future husband were indeed to appear, would it not be much more likely to be Parson Blaise, or Tom Quiney, or young Jelleyman, or one or other of them

that she knew in everyday life? But yet she said to herself—and there was no doubt about her absolute conviction and certainty on this point—that, even if she were to meet one of those coming in from Evesham, not all the magic and mystery and wizardry in the world would drive her to marry him but of her own free good will and choice.

When she had passed through the meadows, and got near to the scattered cottages and barns and orchards of the little hamlet, instead of going forward to these, she bore away to the left, and eventually found herself in a wide and wooded lane. She was less light of heart now; she wished the place were not so very still and lonely. It was a pretty lane this; the ruddy-gray road that wound between luxuriant hedges and tall elms was barred across by alternate sunlight and shadow; and every now and again she had glimpses of the rich and fertile country lying around, with distant hills showing an outline serrated by trees along the pale, summer-like sky. But there was not a human being visible anywhere, nor a sound to be heard but the soft repeated note of the cuckoo. She wished that there were some farm people near at hand, or a shepherd lad, or anybody. She spoke to Roderigo, and her voice sounded strange—it sounded as if she were afraid that some one was listening. Nay, she began, quite unreasonably, to be angry with the wizard. What business had he to interfere with her affairs, and to drive her on to such foolish enterprises? What right had he to challenge her to show that she was not afraid? She was not afraid, she

assured herself. She had as good a title to walk along this lane as any maid in Warwickshire. Only she thought that as soon as she had got as far as the cross at the meeting of the roads (this was all that had been demanded of her) she would go back to Stratford by the public highway rather than return by this solitary lane, for on the public highway there would be farm servants, and laden wains, and carriers, and such-like comfortable and companionable objects.

The next minute—she had almost reached the cross—her heart bounded with an unreasoning tremor of fear: she had suddenly become aware that a stranger was entering the lane from the wide highway beyond. She had only one glimpse of him, for instantly and resolutely she bent her eyes on Don Roderigo, and was determined to keep them there until this person should have passed; and yet that one lightning-like glimpse had told her somewhat. The stranger was young, and of a distinguished bearing and presence; and it certainly was a singular and unusual thing that a gentleman (as he seemed to be, although his travelling cloak concealed most of his attire) should be going afoot and unattended. But her only concern was to let him pass. Ghost or man as he might be, she kept her eyes on the Don. And then, to her increased alarm, she found that the stranger was approaching her.

“I beseech your pardon, lady,” said he, in a most respectful voice, “but know you one in this town of the name of Master Shakespeare?”

She certainly was startled, and even inwardly

aghast; but she had a brave will. She was determined that nothing would drive her either to scream or to run away. And indeed, when she looked up and said, rather breathlessly, "There be several of the name, sir," she was quickly assured that this was no ghost at all, but a substantial and living and breathing young man, tall and dark, of a pleasant expression of face, though in truth there was nothing in those singularly black eyes of his but the most ordinary and matter-of-fact inquiry.

"One Master William Shakespeare," said he in answer to her, "that is widely known."

"It is my father, sir, you speak of," said she, hastily, and in fact somewhat ashamed of her fright.

At this news he removed his hat and made her a gracious obeisance, yet simply, and with not too elaborate a courtesy.

"Since I am so fortunate," said he, "may I beg you to direct me how I shall find the house when I get to the town? I have a letter for him as you may see."

He took out a letter and held it so that, if she liked, she might read the superscription—"To my loving good friend Master William Shakespeare: Deliver these." But Judith merely glanced at the writing.

"'Tis from Master Ben Jonson—that you know of doubtless, madam—commending me to your father. But perhaps," he added, directing toward her a curious timid look of inquiry, "it were as well that I did not deliver it?"

"How so, sir?" she asked.

"I am one that is in misfortune," said he simply; "nay, in peril."

"Truly I am sorry for that, sir," said she, regarding him with frank eyes of sympathy; for indeed there was a kind of sadness in his air, that otherwise was distinguished enough, and even noble. And then she added: "But surely that is the greater reason you should seek my father."

"If I dared—if I knew," he said, apparently to himself. And then he addressed her: "If I make so bold, sweet lady, as to ask you if your father be of the ancient faith—or well disposed toward that, even if he do not openly profess it—I pray you set it down to my need and hard circumstances."

She did not seem to understand.

"I would ask if he be not at heart with the Catholic gentlemen that are looking for better times,—for indeed I have heard it stated of him."

"Oh no, sir—surely not," said Judith in some alarm, for she knew quite enough about the penal laws against priests and recusants, and would not have her father associated in any way with these, especially as she was talking with a stranger.

"Nay, then, it were better I did not deliver the letter," said the young man, with just a touch of hopelessness in his tone. "Under the protection of your father I might have had somewhat more of liberty perchance; but I am content to remain as I am until I can get proofs that will convince them in authority of my innocence; or, mayhap, I may get away from the country altogether and to my friends in Flanders. If they would but set my good friend

Walter Raleigh free from the Tower that also were well, for he and I might make a home for ourselves in another land. I crave your pardon for detaining you, madam, and so bid you farewell."

He raised his hat, and made her a most respectful obeisance, and was about to withdraw.

"Stay, sir," said she, scarcely knowing what she said, but with trouble and anxiety in her gentle eyes.

Indeed, she was somewhat bewildered. So sudden had been the shock of surprise that she had forgotten, or very nearly forgotten, all about ghosts and wizards, about possible lovers or husbands, and only knew that here, in actual fact, was a stranger—and a modest young stranger, too—that was in great trouble, and yet was afraid to seek shelter and aid from her father. That he had no reason to be thus afraid she was certain enough; and yet she dared not assume—she had no reason for believing—that her father was secretly inclined to favour those that were still hoping for the re-establishment of the Catholic faith. The fact was that her father scarcely ever spoke of such matters. He would listen, if he happened to be in the house, to any theological discussion that might be going on, and he would regard this or that minister or preacher calmly, as if trying to understand the good man and his opinions; but he would take no part in the talk; and when the discussion became disputatious, as sometimes happened, and the combatants grew warm, and took to making hot assertions, he would rise and go out idly into the garden,

and look at the young apple-trees, or talk to Don Roderigo. Indeed, at this precise moment, Judith was quite incapable of deciding for herself which party her father would most likely be in sympathy with—the Puritans, who were sore at heart because of the failure of the Hampton Court Conference, or the Catholics, who were no less bitter on account of the severity of the penal laws—and a kind of vague wish arose in her heart that she could ask Prudence Shawe (who paid more attention to such matters, and was, in fact, wrapped up in them) before sending this young man away with his letter of commendation unopened.

“Your brother-in-law, madam, Dr. Hall,” said he, seeing that she did not wish him to leave on the instant, “is well esteemed by the Catholic gentry, as I hear.”

Judith did not answer that; she had been rapidly considering what she could do for one in distress.

“By your leave, sir, I would not have you go away without making further inquiry,” said she. “I will myself get to know how my father is inclined, for indeed he never speaks of such matters to us; and sure I am that, whatever be his opinion, no harm could come to you through seeking his friendship. That I am sure of. If you are in distress, that is enough; he will not ask you whence you come; nor has he censure for anyone; and that is a marvel in one that is so good a man himself that he hath never a word of blame for any one, neither for the highwayman that was taken red-handed, as

it were, last Sunday near to Oxford—‘Why,’ says my father, ‘if he take not life, and be a civil gentleman, I grudge him not a purse or two’—nor for a lesser criminal, my cousin Willie Hart, that but yesterday let the Portuguese singing-bird escape from its cage. ‘Well, well,’ says my father, ‘so much the better, if only it can find food for itself.’ Indeed, you need fear naught but kindness and gentleness; and sure I am that he would be but ill pleased to know that one coming from his friend Benjamin Jonson had been in the neighbourhood and gone away without having speech of him.”

“But this is no matter of courtesy, sweet lady,” said he. “It is of a more dangerous cast; and I must be wary. If, now, you were inclined to do as you say—to make some discreet inquiry as to your good father’s sentiments——”

“Not from himself,” said she, quickly, and with some colour mounting to her cheeks—“for he would but laugh at my speaking of such things—but from my gossip and neighbour I think I could gain sufficient assurance that would set your fears at rest.”

“And how should I come to know?” he said, with some hesitation—for this looked much like asking for another meeting.

But Judith was frank enough. If she meant to confer a kindness, she did not stay to be too scrupulous about the manner of doing it.

“If it were convenient that you could be here this evening,” said she, after a moment’s thought, “Willie Hart and myself often walk over to Shottery after supper. Then could I let you know.”

"But how am I to thank you for such a favour?" said he.

"Nay, it is but little," she answered, "to do for one that comes from my father's friend."

"Rare Ben, as they call him," said he, more brightly. "And now I bethink me, kind lady, that it ill becomes me to have spoken of nothing but my own poor affairs on my first having the honour of meeting with you. Perchance you would like to hear something of Master Jonson, and how he does? May I accompany you on your homeward way for a space, if you are returning to the town? The road here is quiet enough for one that is in hiding, as well as for pleasant walking; and you are well escorted, too," he added, looking at the grave and indifferent Don. "With such a master as your father, and such a sweet mistress, I should not wonder if he became as famous as Sir John Harrington's Bungey that the Prince asked about. You have not heard of him?—the marvellous dog that Sir John would intrust with messages all the way to the court at Greenwich, and he would bring back the answer without more ado. I wonder not that Prince Henry should have asked for an account of all his feats and doings."

Now insensibly she had turned and begun to walk toward Shottery (for she would not ask this unhappy young man to court the light of the open highway), and as he respectfully accompanied her his talk became more and more cheerful, so that one would scarcely have remembered that he was in hiding, and in peril of his life perchance. And

he quickly found that she was most interested in Jonson as being her father's friend and intimate.

"Indeed, I should not much marvel to hear of his being soon in this very town of Stratford," said he, "for he has been talking of late—nay, he has been talking this many a day of it, but who knows when the adventure will take place?—of travelling all the way to Scotland on foot, and writing an account of his discoveries on the road. And then he has a mind to get to the lake of Lomond, to make it the scene of a fisher and pastoral play, he says; and his friend Drummond will go with him; and they speak of getting still farther to the north, and being the guests of the new Scotch lord, Mackenzie of Kintail, that was made a peer last winter. Nay, friend Ben, though at times he gibes at the Scots, at other times he will boast of his Scotch blood—for his grandfather, as I have heard, came from Annandale—and you will often hear him say that whereas the late Queen was a niggard and close-fisted, this Scotch King is lavish and a generous patron. If he go to Scotland, as is his purpose, surely he will come by way of Stratford."

"It were ill done of him else," said Judith. But truly this young gentleman was so bent on entertaining her with tales of his acquaintance in London, and with descriptions of the court shows and pageants, that she had not to trouble herself much to join in the conversation.

"A lavish patron the King has been to him truly," he continued, stooping to pat the Don's head, as if he would make friends with him too, "what with the

masks, and revels, and so forth. Their last tiltings at Prince Henry's barriers exceeded everything that had gone before, as I think—and I marvel not that Ben was found at his best, seeing how the King had been instructing him. Nay, but it was a happy conceit to have our young Lord of the Isles addressed by the Lady of the Lake, and have King Arthur hand him his armour out of the clouds——”

“But where was it, good sir?” said she (to show that she was interested). And now he seemed so cheerful and friendly that she ventured to steal a look at him. In truth, there was nothing very doleful or tragic in his appearance. He was a handsomely-made young man, of about eight-and-twenty or so, with fine features, a somewhat pale and sallow complexion (that distinguished him markedly from the rustic red and white and sun-brown she was familiar with), and eyes of a singular blackness and fire that were exceedingly respectful, but that could, as any one might see, easily break into mirth. He was well habited too, for now he had partly thrown his travelling cloak aside, and his slashed doublet and hose and shoes were smart and clearly of a town fashion. He wore no sword; in his belt there was only a small dagger, of Venetian silver-work on the handle, and with a sheath of stamped crimson velvet.

“Dear lady, you must have heard of them,” he continued, lightly—“I mean of the great doings in the banqueting house at Whitehall, when Prince Henry challenged so many noble lords. ’Twas a brave sight, I assure you; the King and Queen were

there, and the ambassadors from Spain and Venice, and a great and splendid assemblage. And then, when Ben's speeches came to be spoken, there was Cyril Davy, that is said to have the best woman's voice in London, as the Lady of the Lake, and he came forward and said—

‘Lest any yet should doubt, or might mistake
What nymph I am, behold the ample lake
Of which I'm styled, and near it Merlin's tomb;’

and then King Arthur appeared, and our young Lord of the Isles had a magic shield handed to him. Oh, 'twas a noble sight, I warrant you! And I heard that the Duke of Lennox and the Earls of Arundel and Southampton and all of them were but of one mind, that friend Ben had never done better.”

Indeed, the young man, as they loitered along the pretty wooded lane in the hush of the warm still noon (there was scarce enough wind to make a rustle in the great branching elms), and as he talked of all manner of things for the entertainment of this charming companion whom a happy chance had thrown in his way, seemed to be well acquainted with the court and its doings, and all the busy life of London. If she gathered rightly, he had himself been present when the King and the nobles went in the December of the previous year to Deptford to witness the launching of the great ship of the East India Company—the *Trade's Encrease*, it was called—for he described the magnificent banquet in the chief cabin, and how the King gave to Sir Thomas Smith, the Governor, a fine chain of gold,

with his portrait set in a jewel, and how angry his Majesty became when they found that the ship could not be launched on account of the state of the tide. But when he again brought in the name of Jonson, and said how highly the King thought of his writings, and what his Majesty had said of this or the other device or masque that had been commanded of him, Judith grew at length to be not so pleased; and she said, with some asperity: "But the King holds my father in honour also, for he wrote him a letter with his own hand."

"I heard not of that," said he, but of course without appearing to doubt her word.

"Nay, but I saw it," said she. "I saw the letter; and I did not think it well that my father should give it to Julius Shawe, for there be some others that would have valued it as much as he—yes, and been more proud of it, too."

"His own daughter, perchance?" he said, gently.

Judith did not speak. It was a sore subject with her; indeed, she had cried in secret, and bitterly, when she learned that the letter had been casually given away, for her father seemed to put no great store by it. However, that had nothing to do with this unhappy young gentleman that was in hiding. And soon she had dismissed it from her mind, and was engaged in fixing the exact time at which, as she hoped, she would be able to bring him that assurance or that caution in the evening.

"I think it must be the province of women to be kind to the unfortunate," said he, as they came in sight of the cottages; and he seemed to linger

and hesitate in his walk, as if he were afraid of going farther.

"It is but a small kindness," said she; "and I hope it will bring you and my father together. He is but just returned from London, and you will not have much news to give him from his friend; but you will be none the less welcome, for all are welcome to him, but especially those whom he can aid."

"If I were to judge of the father by the daughter, I should indeed expect a friendly treatment," said he, with much courtesy.

"Nay, but it is so simple a matter," said she.

"Then fare you well, Mistress Judith," said he; "if I may make so bold as to guess at a name that I have heard named in London."

"Oh no, sir?" said she, glancing up with some inquiry.

"But indeed, indeed," said he, gallantly. "And who can wonder? 'Twas friend Ben that I heard speak of you; I marvel not that he carried your praises so far. But now, sweet lady, that I see you would go—and I wish not to venture nearer the village there—may I beseech of you at parting a further grace and favour? It is that you would not reveal to any one, no matter what trust you may put in them, that you have seen me or spoken with me. You know not my name, it is true, though I would willingly confide it to you;—indeed it is Leofric Hope, madam; but if it were merely known that you had met with a stranger, curious eyes might be on the alert."

"Fear not, sir," said she, looking at him in her frank way—and there was a kind of friendliness, too, and sympathy in her regard. "Your secret is surely safe in my keeping. I can promise you that none shall know through me that you are in the neighbourhood. Farewell, good sir. I hope your fortunes will mend speedily."

"God keep you, sweet Mistress Judith," said he, raising his hat and bowing low, and not even asking to be allowed to take her hand. "If my ill fortune should carry it so that I see you not again, at least I will treasure in my memory a vision of kindness and beauty that I trust will remain for ever there. Farewell, gentle lady; I am your debtor."

And so they parted; and he stood looking after her and the great dog as they passed through the meadows; and she was making all the haste she might, for although, when Judith's father was at home, the dinner hour was at twelve instead of at eleven, still it would take her all the time to be punctual, and she was scrupulous not to offend. He stood looking after her as long as she was in sight, and then he turned away, saying to himself:

"Why, our Ben did not tell us a tithe of the truth!—for why?—because it was with his tongue, and not with his pen that he described her. By heaven, she is a marvel!—and I dare be sworn, now, that half the clowns in Stratford imagine themselves in love with her."

CHAPTER VI.

WITHIN-DOORS.

WHEN in the afternoon Judith sought out her gentle gossip, and with much cautious tact and discretion began to unfold her perplexities to her, Prudence was not only glad enough to hear nothing further of the wizard—who seemed to have been driven out of Judith's mind altogether by the actual occurrences of the morning—but also she became possessed with a secret wonder and joy; for she thought that at last her dearest and closest friend was awakening to a sense of the importance of spiritual things, and that henceforth there would be a bond of confidence between them far more true and abiding than any that had been before. But soon she discovered that politics had a good deal to do with these hesitating inquiries; and at length the bewildered Prudence found the conversation narrowing and narrowing itself to this definite question: Whether, supposing there were a young man charged with complicity in a Catholic plot, or perhaps having been compromised in some former affair of the kind, and supposing him to appeal to her father, would he, Judith's father, probably be inclined to shelter him and conceal him, and give him what aid was possible until he might get away from the country?

"But what do you mean, Judith?" said Prudence, in dismay. "Have you seen any one? What is't you mean? Have you seen one of the desperate men that were concerned with Catesby?"

Indeed, it was not likely that either of these two Warwickshire maidens had already forgotten the terrible tidings that rang through the land but a few years before, when the Gunpowder Treason was discovered; nor how the conspirators fled into this very county; nor yet how, in the following January, on a bitterly cold and snowy day, there was brought into the town the news of the executions in St. Paul's Churchyard and at Westminster. And, in truth, when Prudence Shawe mentioned Catesby's name Judith's cheek turned pale. It was but for an instant. She banished the ungenerous thought the moment that it occurred to her. No, she was sure that the unhappy young man who had appealed to her compassion could not have been concerned in any such bloody enterprise. His speech was too gentle for that. Had he not declared that he only wanted time to prove his innocence? It is true, he had said something about his friends in Flanders, and often enough had she heard the Puritan divines denouncing Flanders as the very hotbed of the machinations of the Jesuits; but that this young man might have friends amongst the Jesuits did not appear to her as being in itself a criminal thing, any more than the possibility of his being a Catholic was sufficient of itself to deprive him of her frank and generous sympathy.

"I may not answer you yea nor nay, sweet

mouse," said she; "but assure yourself that I am not in league with any desperate villain. I but put a case. We live in quiet times now, do we not, good Prue? and I take it that those who like not the country are free to leave it. But tell me, if my father were to speak openly, which of the parties would he most affect? And how stands he with the King? Nay, the King himself, of what religion is he at heart, think you?"

"These be questions!" said Prudence, staring aghast at such ignorance.

"I but use my ears," said Judith indifferently, "and the winds are not more variable than the opinions that one listens to. Well you know it, Prue. Here is one that says the King is in conscience a papist, as his mother was; and that he gave a guarantee to the Catholic gentry ere he came to the throne; and that soon or late we shall have mass again; and then comes another with the story that the Pope is hot and angry because the King misuseth him in his speech, calling him Anti-christ and the like; and that he has complained to the French King on the matter, and that there is even talk of excommunication. What can one believe? How is one to know? Indeed, good mouse, you would have me more anxious about such things, but why should one add to one's difficulties? I am content to be like my father, and stand aside from the quarrel."

"Your wit is too great for me, dear Judith," her friend said, rather sadly; "and I will not argue with you. But well I know there may be a calmness

that is of ignorance and indifference, and that is slothful and sinful; and there may be a calmness that is of assured wisdom and knowledge of the truth, and that I trust your father has attained to. That he should keep aside from disputes I can well understand."

"But touching the King, dear cousin," said Judith, who had her own ends in view. "How stands my father with the King and his religion? Nay, but I know, and every one knows, that in all other matters they are friends; for your brother has the King's letter——"

"That I wish you had yourself, Judith, since your heart is set upon it," said her companion, gently.

Judith did not answer that.

"But as regards religion, sweet Prue, what think you my father would most favour, were there a movement any way?—a change to the ancient faith, perchance?"

She threw out the question with a kind of studied carelessness, as if it were a mere matter of speculation; but there was a touch of warmth in Prudence's answer:

"What, then, Judith? You think he would disturb the peace of the land, and give us over again to the priests and their idol worship? I trow not." Then something seemed to occur to her suddenly. "But if you have any doubt, Judith, I can set your mind at rest—of a surety I can."

"How, then, gossip?"

"I will tell you the manner of it. No longer

ago than yesterday evening I was seated at the window reading—it was the volume that Dr. Hall brought me from Worcester, and that I value more and more the longer I read it—and your father came into the house asking for Julius. So I put the book on the table, with the face downward, and away I went to seek for my brother. Well, then, when I came back to the room, there was your father standing at the window reading the book that I had left, and I would not disturb him; and when he had finished the page, he turned, saying, ‘Good bishop! good bishop!’ and putting down the book on the table just as he had found it. Dear Judith, I hope you will think it no harm and no idle curiosity that made me take up the book as soon as my brother was come in, and examine the passage, and mark it——”

“Harm!—bless thee, sweetheart!” Judith exclaimed. And she added eagerly: “But have you the book? Will you read it to me? Is it about the King? Do, dear cousin, read to me what it was that my father approved. Beshrew me! but I shall have to take to school lessons, after all, lest I outlive even your gentle patience.”

Straightway Prudence had gone to a small cupboard of boxes in which she kept all her most valued possessions, and from thence she brought a stout little volume, which, as Judith perceived, had a tiny book-mark of satin projecting from the red-edged leaves.

“Much comfort, indeed, have I found in these ‘Comfortable Notes,’” said she. “I wish, Judith,

you, that can think of everything, would tell me how I am to show to Dr. Hall that I am more and more grateful to him for his goodness. What can I do?—words are such poor things!”

“But the passage, good Prue—what was’t he read? I pray you let me hear,” said Judith, eagerly; “for here, indeed, might be a key to many mysteries.”

“Listen, then,” said her companion, opening the book. “The Bishop, you understand, Judith, is speaking of the sacrifices the Jews made to the Lord, and he goes on to say:

“‘Thus had this people their peace-offerings; that is, duties of thankfulness to their God for the peace and prosperity vouchsafed unto them. And most fit it was that He should often be thanked for such favours. The like mercies and goodness remain to us at this day: are we either freed from the duty or left without means to perform it? No, no; but as they had oxen and kine, and sheep and goats, then appointed and allowed, so have we the calves of our lips and the sacrifice of thanksgiving still remaining for us, and as strictly required of us as these (in those days) were of them. Offer them up, then, with a free heart and with a feeling soul. Our peace is great; our prosperity comfortable; our God most sweet and kind; and shall we not offer? The public is sweet, the private is sweet, and forget you to offer? We lay us down and take our rest, and this our God maketh us dwell in safety. Oh, where is your offering? We rise again and go to our labour, and a dog is not heard to move his

tongue among us: Owe we no offering? O Lord, O Lord, make us thankful to Thee for these mercies; the whole state we live in, for the common and our several souls, for several mercies now many years enjoyed. O touch us; O turn us from our fearful dulness, and abusing of this so sweet, so long, and so happy peace! Continue thy sacred servant'—surely you know, Judith, whom he means—'the chiefest means under Thee of this our comfort, and ever still furnish him with wise helps, truly fearing Thee, and truly loving him. Let our heads go to the grave in this peace, if it may be Thy blessed pleasure, and our eyes never see the change of so happy an estate. Make us thankful and full of peace-offerings; be Thou still ours, and ever merciful. Amen! Amen!'"

"And what said he, sweet Prue—what said my father?" Judith asked, though her eyes were distant and thoughtful.

"'Good bishop! good bishop!' said he, as if he were right well pleased, and he put down the book on the table. Nay, you may be certain, Judith, that your father would have naught to do with the desperate men that would fain upset the country, and bring wars among us, and hand us over to the Pope again. I have heard of such; I have heard that many of the great families have but a lip loyalty, and have malice at their heart, and would willingly plunge the land in blood if they could put the priests in power over us again. Be sure your father is not of that mind."

"But if one were in distress, Prudence," said the

other, absently, "perchance with a false charge hanging over him that could be disproved—say that one were in hiding—and only anxious to prove his innocence, or to get away from the country, is my father likely to look coldly on such a one in misfortune? No, no, surely!"

"But of whom do you speak, Judith?" exclaimed her friend, regarding her with renewed alarm. "It cannot be that you know of such a one? Judith, I beseech you speak plainly! You have met with some stranger that is unknown to your own people? You said you had but put a case, but now you speak as if you knew the man. I beseech you, for the love between us, speak plainly to me, Judith!"

"I may not," said the other, rising. And then she added, more lightly, "Nay, have no fear, dear Prue; if there be any danger it is not I that run it, and soon there will be no occasion for my withholding the secret from you, if secret there be."

"I cannot understand you, Judith," said her friend, with the pale, gentle face full of a tender wistfulness and anxiety.

"Such timid eyes!" said Judith, laughing good-naturedly. "Indeed, Prudence, I have seen no ghost, and Goodman Wizard has failed me utterly; nor sprite nor phantom has been near me. In sooth I have buried poor Tom's bit of rosemary to little purpose. And now I must get me home, for Master Parson comes this afternoon, and I will but wait the preaching to hear Susan sing: 'tis worth the penance. Farewell, sweet mouse; get you rid of your alarm. The sky will clear all in good time."

So they kissed each other, and she left; still in much perplexity, it is true, but nevertheless resolved to tell the young man honestly and plainly the result of her inquiries.

As it turned out, she was to hear something more about the King and politics and religion that afternoon, for when she got home to New Place Master Blaise was already there, and he was eagerly discussing with Judith's mother and her sister the last news that had been brought from London; or rather he was expounding it, with emphatic assertions and denunciations that the women folk received for the most part with a mute but quite apparent sympathy. He was a young man of about six-and-twenty, rather inclined to be stout, but with strongly lined features, fair complexion and hair, an intellectual forehead, and sharp and keen gray eyes. The one point that recommended him to Judith's favour—which he openly and frankly, but with perfect independence, sought—was the uncompromising manner in which he professed his opinions. These frequently angered her, and even at times roused her to passionate indignation; and yet, oddly enough, she had a kind of lurking admiration for the very honesty that scorned to curry favour with her by means of any suppression or evasion. It may be that there was a trace of the wisdom of the serpent in this attitude of the young parson, who was shrewd-headed as well as clear-eyed, and was as quick as any to read the fearless quality of Judith's character. At all events, he would not yield to any of her prejudices; he would not

stoop to flatter her; he would not abate one jot of his protests against the vanity and pride, the heathenish show and extravagance, of women; the heinousness and peril of indifferentism in matters of doctrine; and the sinfulness of the life of them that countenanced stage plays and such like devilish iniquities. It was this last that was the real stumbling block and contention between them. Sometimes Judith's eyes burned. Once she rose and got out of the room. "If I were a man, Master Parson," she was saying to herself, with shut teeth, "by the life of me I would whip you from Stratford town to Warwick!" And indeed there was ordinarily a kind of armed truce between these two, so that no stranger or acquaintance could very easily decide what their precise relations were; although every one knew that Judith's mother and sister held the young divine in great favour, and would fain have had him of the family.

At the moment of Judith's entrance he was much exercised, as has been said, on account of the news that was but just come from London—how that the King was driving at still further impositions because of the Commons begrudging him supplies; and naturally Master Blaise warmly approved of the Commons, that had been for granting the liberties to the Puritans which the King had refused. And not only was this the expression of a general opinion on the subject, but he maintained as an individual—and as a very emphatic individual, too—that the prerogatives of the crown, the wardships and purveyances and what not, were monstrous and abomin-

able, and a way of escape from the just restraint of Parliament, and he declared with a sudden vehemence that he would rather perish at the stake than contribute a single benevolence to the royal purse. Judith's mother, a tall, slight, silver-haired woman, with eyes that had once been of extraordinary beauty, but now were grown somewhat sad and worn, and her daughter Susanna Hall, who was darker than her sister Judith as regarded hair and eyebrows, but who had blue-gray eyes of a singular clearness and quickness and intelligence, listened and acquiesced; but perhaps they were better pleased when they found the young parson come out of that vehement mood; though still he was sharp of tongue and sarcastic, saying as an excuse for the King that now he was revenging himself on the English Puritans for the treatment he had received at the hands of the Scotch Presbyterians, who had harried him not a little. He had not a word for Judith; he addressed his discourse entirely to the other two. And she was content to sit aside, for indeed this dissatisfaction with the crown on the part of the Puritans was nothing strange or novel to her, and did not in the least help to solve her present perplexity.

And now the maids (for Judith's father would have no serving-men, nor stablemen, nor husbandmen of any grade whatever come within doors; the work of the house was done entirely by women folk) entered to prepare the long oaken table for supper, seeing which Master Blaise suggested that before that meal it might be as well to devote a space to

divine worship. So the maids were bidden to stay their preparations, and to remain, seating themselves dutifully on a bench brought crosswise, and the others sat at the table in their usual chairs, while the preacher opened the large Bible that had been fetched for him, and proceeded to read the second chapter of the Book of Jeremiah, expounding as he went along. This running commentary was, in fact, a sermon applied to all the evils of the day, as the various verses happened to offer texts; and the ungodliness and the vanity and the turning away from the Lord that Jeremiah lamented were attributed in no unsparing fashion to the town of Stratford and the inhabitants thereof: "Hear ye the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" Nor did he spare himself and his own calling: "The priests said not, Where is the Lord? and they that should minister the law knew me not: the pastors also offended against me, and the prophets prophesied in Baal, and went after things that did not profit." And there were bold paraphrases and inductions, too: "What hast thou now to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Nilus? or what makest thou in the way of Asshur, to drink the waters of the river?" Was not that the seeking of strange objects—of baubles, and jewels, and silks, and other instruments of vanity—from abroad, from the papist land of France, to lure the eye and deceive the senses, and turn away the mind

from the dwelling on holy things? "Can a maid forget her ornament, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number." This was, indeed, a fruitful text, and there is no doubt that Judith was indirectly admonished to regard the extreme simplicity of her mother's and sister's attire; so that there can be no excuse whatever for her having in her mind at this very moment some vague fancy that as soon as supper was over she would go to her own chamber and take out a certain beaver hat. She did not often wear it, for it was a present that her father had once brought her from London, and it was ranked among her most precious treasures; but surely on this evening (she was saying to herself) it was fitting that she should wear it, not from any personal vanity, but to the end that this young gentleman, who seemed to know several of her father's acquaintances in London, should understand that the daughter of the owner of New Place was no mere country wench, ignorant of what was in the fashion. It is grievous that she should have been concerned with such frivolous thoughts. However, the chapter came to an end in due time.

Then good Master Blaise said they would sing the One hundred and thirty-seventh Psalm; and this was truly what Judith had been waiting for. She herself was but an indifferent singer. She could do little more than hum such snatches of old songs as occurred to her during her careless rambles, and that only for her private ear; but her sister Susanna had a most noble, pure and clear contralto

voice that could at any time bring tears to Judith's eyes, and that, when she joined in the choral parts of the service in church, made many a young man's heart to tremble strangely. In former days she used to sing to the accompaniment of her lute; but that was given over now. Once or twice Judith had brought the discarded instrument to her, and said:

"Susan, sweet Susan, for once—for once only—sing to me '*The rose is from my garden gone.*'"

"Why, then—to make you cry, silly one?" the elder sister would answer. "What profit those idle tears, child, that are but a luxury and a sinful indulgence?"

"Susan, but once!" Judith would plead (with the tears almost already in her eyes)—"once only, '*The rose is from my garden gone.*' There is none can sing it like you."

But the elder sister was obdurate, as she considered was right; and Judith, as she walked through the meadows in the evening, would sometimes try the song for herself, thinking, or endeavouring to think, that she could hear in it the pathetic vibration of her sister's voice. Indeed, at this moment the small congregation assembled around the table would doubtless have been deeply shocked had they known with what a purely secular delight Judith was now listening to the words of the psalm. There was but one Bible in the house, so that Master Blaise read out the two first lines (lest any of the maids might have a lax memory)—

"When as we sat in Babylon
The rivers round about"—

and that they sang; then they proceeded in like manner:

“And in remembrance of Sion,
The tears for grief burst out;
We hanged our harps and instruments
The willow trees upon;
For in that place men for their use
Had planted many a one.”

It is probable, indeed, that Judith was so wrapped up in her sister's singing that it did not occur to her to ask herself whether this psalm, too, had not been chosen with some regard to the good preacher's discontent with those in power. At all events, he read out, and they sang, no farther than these two verses—

“Then they to whom we prisoners were
Said to us tauntingly:
Now let us hear your Hebrew songs
And pleasant melody.
Alas! (said we) who can once frame
His sorrowful heart to sing
The praises of our loving God
Thus under a strange king?

But yet if I Jerusalem
Out of my heart let slide,
Then let my fingers quite forget
The warbling harp to guide;
And let my tongue within my mouth
Be tied for ever fast,
If that I joy before I see
Thy full deliverance past.”

Then there was a short and earnest prayer; and, that over, the maids set to work to get forward the supper; and young Willie Hart was called in from

the garden—Judith's father being away at Wilnecote on some important business there. In due course of time, supper being finished, and a devout thanksgiving said, Judith was free; and instantly she fled away to her own chamber to don her bravery. It was not vanity (she again said to herself); it was that her father's daughter should show that she knew what was due to him and his standing in the town; and, indeed, as she now regarded herself in the little mirror—she wore a half-circle farthingale, and had on one of her smartest ruffs—and when she set on her head of short brown curls this exceedingly pretty hat (it was of gray beaver above, and underneath it was lined with black satin, and all around the rim was a row of hollow brass beads that tinkled like small bells) she was quite well satisfied with her appearance, and that she was fairly entitled to be. Then she went down and summoned her sweetheart Willie to act as her companion and protector and ally; and together these two passed forth from the house—into the golden clear evening.

CHAPTER VII.

A FAREWELL.

ALWAYS, when she got out into the open air, her spirits rose into a pure content; and now, as they were walking westward through the peaceful meadows, the light of the sunset was on her face; and there was a kind of radiance there, and careless happiness, that little Willie Hart scarce dared look upon, so abject and wistful was the worship that the small lad laid at his pretty cousin's feet. He was a sensitive and imaginative boy; and the joy and crown of his life was to be allowed to walk out with his cousin Judith, her hand holding his; and it did not matter to him whether she spoke to him, or whether she was busy with her private thinking, and left him to his own pleasure and fancies. He had many of these; for he had heard of all kinds of great and noble persons—princesses and empresses and queens; but to him his cousin Judith was the Queen of queens; he could not believe that any one ever was more beautiful—or more gentle and lovable, in a magical and mystical way—than she was; and in church, on the quiet Sunday mornings, when the choir was singing, and all else silence, and when dreams were busy in certain small brains, if there were any far-away pictures of

angels in white and shining robes, coming towards one through rose-red celestial gardens, be sure they had Judith's eyes and the light and witchery of these; and that, when they spoke (if such wonderful creatures vouchsafed to speak) it was with the softness of Judith's voice. So it is not to be conceived that Judith, who knew something of this mute and secret adoration, had any malice in her heart when, on this particular evening, she began to question the boy as to the kind of sweetheart he would choose when he was grown up: the fact being, that she spoke from idleness—and a wish to be friendly and companionable—her thoughts being really occupied elsewhere.

"Come now, Willie, tell me," said she, "what sort of one you will choose, some fifteen or twenty years hence, when you are grown up to be a man, and will be going abroad from place to place. In Coventry, perchance, you may find her, or over at Evesham, or in Warwick, or Worcester, or as far away as Oxford: in all of them are plenty of pretty maidens to be had for the asking, so you be civil-spoken enough, and bear yourself well. Now tell me your fancy, sweetheart: what shall her height be?"

"Why, you know, Judith," said he, rather shamefacedly, "Just your height."

"My height?" she said, carelessly. "Why that is neither the one way nor the other. My father says I am just as high as his heart; and with that I am content. Well, now, her hair—what colour of hair shall she have?"

"Like yours, Judith; and it must come round about her ears like yours," said he, glancing up for a moment.

"Eyes: must they be black, or gray, or brown, or blue: nay, you shall have your choice, sweetheart Willie; there be all sorts, if you go far enough afield and look around you. What eyes do you like, now?"

"You know well, Judith, that no one has such pretty eyes as you; these are the ones I like, and no others."

"Bless the boy!—would you have her to be like me?"

"Just like you, Judith—altogether," said he, promptly; and he added more shyly, "For you know there is none as pretty, and they all of them say that."

"Marry, now!" said she, with a laugh. "Here be news. What? When you go choosing your sweetheart, would you pick out one that had as large hands as these?"

She held forth her hands, and regarded them; and yet with some complacency, for she had put on a pair of scented gloves which her father had brought her from London, and these were beautifully embroidered with silver, for he knew her tastes, and that she was not afraid to wear finery, whatever the preachers might say.

"Why, you know, Judith," said he, "that there is none has such pretty hands as you, nor so white, nor so soft."

"Heaven save us, am I perfection, then?" she

cried (but she was pleased). "Must she be altogether like me?"

"Just so, cousin Judith; altogether like you; and she must wear pretty things like you, and walk as you walk, and speak like you, else I shall not love her nor go near her, though she were the Queen herself."

"Well said, sweetheart Willie!—you shall to the Court some day, if you can speak so fair! And shall I tell you, now, how you must woo and win such an one?" she continued, lightly. "It may be you shall find her here or there—in a farmhouse, perchance; or she may be a great lady with her coach; or a wench in an ale-house; but if she be as you figure her, this is how you shall do: you must not grow up to be too nice and fine and delicate-handed; you must not bend too low for her favour; but be her lord and governor; and you must be ready to fight for her, if need there be—yes, you shall not suffer a word to be said in dispraise of her; and for slanderers you must have a cudgel and a stout arm withal; and yet you must be gentle with her, because she is a woman; and yet not too gentle, for you are a man; and you must be no slape-face, with whining through the nose that we are all devilish and wicked and the children of sin; and you must be no tavern-seeker, with oaths and drunken jests and the like; and when you find her you must be the master of her—and yet a gentle master; marry, I cannot tell you more; but, as I hope for Heaven, sweet Willie, you will do well and fairly if she love thee half as much as I do!"

And she patted the boy's head. What sudden pang was it that went through his heart?

"They say you are going to marry Parson Blaise, Judith," said he, looking up at her.

"Do they, now!" said she, with a touch of colour in her face. "They are too kind that would take from me the business of choosing for myself."

"Is it true, Judith?"

"It is but idle talk; heed it not, sweetheart," said she, rather sharply. "I would they were as busy with their fingers as with their tongues; there would be more wool spun in Warwickshire!"

But here she remembered that she had no quarrel with the lad, who had but innocently repeated the gossip he had heard; and so she spoke to him in a more gentle fashion; and, as they were now come to a parting of the ways, she said that she had a message to deliver, and bade him go on by himself to the cottage, and have some flowers gathered for her from out of the garden by the time she should arrive. He was a biddable boy; and went on without further question. Then she turned off to the left, and in a few minutes was in the wide and wooded lane where she was to meet the young gentleman that had appealed to her friendliness.

And there, sure enough, he was; and as he came forward, hat in hand, to greet her, those eloquent black eyes of his expressed so much pleasure (and admiration of a respectful kind) that Judith became for a moment a trifle self-conscious, and remembered that she was in unusually brave

attire. There may have been something else: some quick remembrance of the surprise and alarm of the morning; and also—in spite of her determination to banish such unworthy fancies—some frightened doubt as to whether, after all, there might not be a subtle connection between her meeting with this young gentleman and the forecasts of the wizard. This was but for a moment; but it confused her in what she had intended to say (for, in crossing the meadows, she had been planning out certain speeches as well as talking idly to Willie Hart), and she was about to make some stumbling confession to the effect that she had obtained no clear intelligence from her gossip Prudence Shawe when the young gentleman himself absolved her from all further difficulty.

“I beseech your pardon, sweet lady,” said he, “that I have caused you so much trouble, and that to no end; for I am of a mind now not to carry the letter to your father, whatever hopes there might be of his sympathy and friendship.”

She stared in surprise.

“Nay, but, good sir,” said she, “since you have the letter, and are so near to Stratford, that is so great a distance from London, surely it were a world of pities you did not see my father. Not that I can honestly gather that he would have any favour for a desperate enterprise upsetting the peace of the land——”

“I am in none such, Mistress Judith, believe me,” said he, quickly. “But it behoves me to be cautious; and I have heard that within the last few

hours which summons me away. If I were inclined to run the risk, there is no time, at this present; and what I can do now is to try to thank you for the kindness you have shown to one that has no habit of forgetting."

"You are going away forthwith?" said she.

There was no particular reason why she should be sorry at his departure from the neighbourhood, except that he was an extraordinarily gentle-spoken young man, and of a courteous breeding, whom her father, as she thought, would have been pleased to welcome as being commended from his friend Ben Jonson. Few visitors came to New Place; the faces to be met with there were grown familiar year after year. It seemed a pity that this stranger—and so fair-spoken a stranger, moreover—should be close at hand, without making her father's acquaintance.

"Yes, sweet lady," said he, in the same respectful way, "it is true that I must quit my present lodging for a time; but I doubt whether I could find anywhere a quieter or securer place—nay, I have no reason to fear you, I will tell you freely that it is Bassfield Farm, that is on the left before you go down the hill to Bidford; and it is like enough I may come back thither when that I see how matters stand with me in London."

And then he glanced at her, with a certain diffidence.

"Perchance I am too daring," said he, "and yet your courtesy makes me bold. Were I to communicate with you when I return——"

He paused; and his hesitation well became him; it was more eloquent in its modesty than many words.

"That were easily done," said Judith, at once, and with her usual frankness; "but I must tell you, good sir, that any written message you might send me I should have to show to my friend and gossip, Prudence Shawe, that reads and writes for me, being so skilled in that; and when you said that to no one was the knowledge to be given that you were in this neighbourhood——"

"Sweet lady," said he, instantly, with much gratitude visible in those handsome dark eyes, "if I may so far trespass on your goodness, I would leave that also within your discretion. One that you have chosen to be your friend must needs be trustworthy; nay, I am sure of that."

"But my father, too, good sir——"

"Nay, not so," said he, with some touch of entreaty in his voice. "Take it not ill of me, but one that is in peril must use precautions for his safety, even though they savour of ill manners and suspicion."

"As you will, sir, as you will; I know little of such matters," Judith said. "But yet I know that you do wrong to mistrust my father——"

"Nay, dearest lady," he said, quickly, "it is you that do me wrong to use such words. I mistrust him not; but indeed I dare not disclose to him the charge that is brought against me until I have clearer proofs of my innocence; and these I hope to have in time, when I may present myself to your

father without fear. Meanwhile, sweet Mistress Judith, I can but ill express my thanks to you that you have vouchsafed to lighten the tedium of my hiding through these few words that have passed between us; did you but know the dulness of the days at the farm—for sad thoughts are but sorry companions—you would understand my gratitude towards you——”

“Nay, nothing, good sir, nothing,” said she; and then she paused, in some difficulty. She did not like to bid him farewell without any reference whatsoever to the future; for in truth she wished to hear more of him, and how his fortunes prospered. And yet she hesitated about betraying so much interest—of however distant and ordinary a kind—in the affairs of a stranger. Her usual frank sympathy conquered: besides, was not this unhappy young man the friend of her father’s friend?

“Is it to the farm that you return when you have been to London?” she asked.

“I trust so: better security I could not easily find elsewhere; and my well-wishers have means of communication with me, so that I can get the news there. Pray Heaven I may soon be quit of this skulking in corners; I like it not; it is not the life of a free man.”

“I hope your fortunes will mend, sir; and speedily,” said she; and there was an obvious sincerity in her voice.

“Why,” said he, with a laugh—for, indeed, this young man, to be one in peril of his life, bore himself with a singularly free and undaunted de-

meanour; and he was not looking around him in a furtive manner, as if he feared to be observed; but was allowing his eyes to rest on Judith's eyes, and on the details of her costume (which he seemed to approve) in a quite easy and unconcerned manner—"the birds and beasts we hunt are allowed to rest at times; but a man in hiding has no peace nor freedom from week's end to week's end—no, nor at any moment of the day or night. And if the good people that shelter him are not entirely of his own station; and if he cares to have but little speech with them; and if the only book in the house be the family Bible, then the days are like to pass slowly with him. Can you wonder, sweet Mistress Judith," he continued, turning his eyes to the ground, in a modest manner, "that I shall carry away the memory of this meeting with you as a treasure, and dwell on it, and recall the kindness of each word you have spoken?"

"In truth, no, good sir," said she, with a touch of colour in her cheeks—that caught the warm golden light shining over from the west. "I would not have you think them of any importance, except the hope that matters may go well with you."

"And if they should," said he; "or if they should go ill, and if I were to presume to think that you cared to know, then, when I return to Bassfield I might make so bold as to send you some brief tidings through your friend Mistress Prudence Shawe, that I am sure must be discreet, since she has won your confidence. But why should I do so?" he added after a second. "Why should

I trouble you with news of one whose good or evil fortune cannot concern you?"

"Nay, sir, I wish you well," said she, simply; "and would fain hear better tidings of your condition. If you may not come at present to New Place, where you would have better counsel than I can give you, at least you may remember that there is one in the household there that will be glad when she hears of your welfare, and better pleased still when she learns that you are free to make her father's friendship."

This was clearly a dismissal; and after a few more words of gratitude on his part (he seemed almost unable to take away his eyes from her face, or to say all that he would fain say of thanks for her gracious intervention and sympathy) they parted; and forthwith Judith—now with a much lighter heart, for this interview had cost her not a little embarrassment and anxiety—hastened away back through the lane in the direction of the barns and gardens of Shottery. All these occurrences of the day had happened so rapidly that she had had but little time to reflect over them; but now she was clearly glad that she should be able to talk over the whole affair with Prudence Shawe. There would be comfort in that and also safety; for, if the truth must be told, that wild and bewildering fancy that perchance the wizard had prophesied truly would force itself on her mind in a disquieting manner. But she strove to reason herself and laugh herself out of such imaginings. She had plenty of courage and a strong will; from the first she had

made light of the wizard's pretensions; she was not going to alarm herself about the possible future consequences of this accidental meeting. And indeed, when she recalled the particulars of that meeting, she came to think that the circumstances of the young man could not be so very desperate. He did not speak nor look like one in imminent peril; his gay description of the masques and entertainments of the Court was not the talk of a man seriously and really in danger of his life. Perhaps he had been in some thoughtless escapade; and was waiting for the bruit of it to blow over; perhaps he was unused to confinement, and may have exaggerated (for this also occurred to her) somewhat in order to win her sympathy. But anyhow, he was in some kind of misfortune or trouble; and she was sorry for him; and she thought that if Prudence Shawe could see him, and observe how well-bred, and civil-spoken, and courteous a young gentleman he seemed to be—she, too, would pity the dulness of the life he must be leading at the farm, and be glad to do anything to relieve such a tedium. In truth, by the time Judith was drawing near her grandmother's cottage, she had convinced herself that there was no very dark mystery connected with this young man; that she had not been holding converse with any dangerous villain or conspirator; and that soon everything would be cleared up, and perhaps he himself present himself at New Place, with Ben Jonson's letter in his hand. So she was in a cheerful enough frame of mind when she arrived at the cottage.

This was a picturesque little building of brick and timber, with a substantial roof of thatch, and irregularly-placed small windows; and it was prettily set in front of a wild and variegated garden; and of course all the golden glow of the west was now flooding the place with its beautiful light, and causing the little rectangular panes in the open casements to gleam like jewels. And here, at the wooden gate of the garden, was Willie Hart, who seemed to have been using the time profitably; for he had a most diverse and sweet-scented gathering of flowers and herbs of a humble and familiar kind—forget-me-nots, and pansies, and wallflower, and mint, and sweet-brier, and the like—to present to his pretty cousin.

“Well done, sweetheart, and are all these for me?” said she, as she passed within the little gate, and stood for a moment, arranging and regarding them. “What, then, what is this?—what mean you by it, cousin Willie?”

“By what, cousin Judith?” said the small boy, looking up with his wondering and wistful eyes.

“Why,” said she, gaily, “this pansy that you have put fair in the front—know you not the name of it?”

“Indeed, I know it not, cousin Judith.”

“Ah, you cunning one: well you know it, I’ll be sworn: why, ’tis one of the chiefest favourites everywhere—did you never hear it called ‘Kiss-me-at-the-gate?’ Marry, ’tis an excellent name; and if I take you at your word, little sweetheart?”

And so they went into the cottage together; and she had her arm lying lightly round his neck.

CHAPTER VIII.

A QUARREL.

BUT instantly her manner changed. Just within the doorway of the passage that cut the rambling cottage into two halves, and attached to a string that was tied to the handle of the door, lay a small spaniel-gentle, peacefully snoozing; and well Judith knew that the owner of the dog (which she had heard, indeed, was meant to be presented to herself) was inside. However, there was no retreat possible, if retreat she would have preferred; for here was the aged grandmother—a little old woman, with fresh pink cheeks, silver-white hair, and keen eyes—come out to see if it were Judith's footsteps she had heard; and she was kindly in her welcome of the girl; though usually she grumbled a good deal about her, and would maintain that it was pure pride and wilfulness that kept her from getting married.

"Here be finery!" said she, stepping back as if to gain a fairer view. "God a mercy, wench, have you come to your senses at last?—be you seeking a husband?—would you win one of them?—they have waited a goodly time for the bating of your pride; but you must after them at last—ay, ay, I thought 'twould come to that."

“Good grandmother, you give me no friendly welcome,” said Judith. “And Willie here; have you no word for him, that he is come to see how you do?”

“Nay, come in, then, sweetings both; come in and sit ye down; little Willie has been in the garden long enough, though you know I grudge you not the flowers, wench. Ay, ay, there is one within, Judith, that would fain be a nearer neighbour, as I hear, if you would but say yea; and bethink ye, wench, an apple may hang too long on the bough—your bravery may be put on to catch the eye when it is over late——”

“I pray you, good grandmother, forbear,” said Judith, with some asperity. “I have my own mind about such things.”

“All’s well, wench, all’s well,” said the old dame, as she led the way into the main room of the cottage. It was a wide and spacious apartment, with heavy black beams overhead; a mighty fireplace; here or there a window cut in the walls just as it seemed to have been wanted; and in the middle of the floor a plain oak table, on which were placed a jug and two or three horn tumblers.

Of course Judith knew whom she had to expect: the presence of the little spaniel-gentle at the door had told her that. This young fellow that now quickly rose from his chair and came forward to meet her—“Good even to you, Judith,” said he, in a humble way, and his eyes seemed to beseech her favour—was as yet but in his two-and-twentieth year, but his tall and lithe and muscular figure had al-

ready the firm set of manhood on it. He was spare of form, and square-shouldered; his head smallish, his brown hair short; his features were regular, and the forehead, if not high, was square and firm; the general look of him was suggestive of a sculptured Greek or Roman wrestler, but that this deprecating glance of the eyes was not quite consistent. And to tell the truth, wrestling and his firm-sinewed figure had something to do with his extreme humility on this occasion. He was afraid that Judith had heard something. To have broken the head of a tapster was not a noble performance, no matter how the quarrel was forced on him; and this was but the most recent of several squabbles; for the championship in the athletic sports of a country neighbourhood is productive of rivals who may take many ways of provoking anger. "Good even to you, Judith," said he, as if he really would have said, "Pray you, believe not all the ill you hear of me!" Judith, however, did not betray anything by her manner, which was friendly enough in a kind of formal way, and distinctly reserved. She sate down, and asked her grandmother what news she had of the various members of the family, that now were widely scattered throughout Warwickshire. She declined the cup of merry-go-down that the young man civilly offered to her. She had a store of things to tell about her father; and about the presents he had brought; and about the two pieces of song-music that Master Robert Johnson had sent, that her father would have Susan try over on the lute; and the other twenty acres that were to be added;

and the talk there had been of turning the house opposite New Place, at the corner of Chapel Street and Scholars Lane, into a tavern; and how that had happily been abandoned—for her father wanted no tavern-revelry within hearing; and so forth; but all this was addressed to the grandmother. The young man got scarce a word; though now and again he would interpose gently, and, as it were, begging her to look his way. She was far kinder to Willie Hart, who was standing by her side; for sometimes she would put her hand on his shoulder or stroke his long yellow-brown hair.

“Willie says he will have just such another as I, grandmother,” said she, when these topics were exhausted, “to be his sweetheart when he grows up; so you see there be some that value me.”

“Look to it that you be not yourself unmarried then, Judith,” said the old dame, who was never done grumbling on this account. “I should not marvel; they that refuse when they are sought come in time to wonder that there are none to seek—nay, ’tis so, I warrant you. You are hanging late on the bough, wench; see you be not forgotten——”

“But, good grandmother,” said Judith, with some colour in her cheeks (for this was an awkward topic in the presence of this youth,) “would you have me break from the rule of the family? My mother was six-and-twenty when she married, and Susan four-and-twenty; and indeed there might come one of us who did not perceive the necessity of marrying at all.”

“In God’s name, if that be your mind, wench,

hold to it! Hold to it, I say!" And then the old dame glanced with her sharp eyes at the pretty costume of her visitor. "But I had other thoughts when I saw such a fine young madam at the door; in truth, they befit you well, these braveries; indeed they do; though 'tis a pity to have them decking out one that is above the marrying trade. But take heed, wench, take heed lest you change your mind when it is too late; the young men may hold you to your word; and you find yourself forsaken when you least expected it."

"Give ye thanks for your good comfort, grandmother," said Judith, indifferently. And then she rose. "Come, Willie, 'tis about time we were going through the fields to the town. What message have you, grandmother, for my father? He is busy from morning till night since his coming home; but I know he will be over to visit you soon. The flowers, Willie—did you leave them on the bench outside?"

But she was not allowed to depart in this fashion. The old dame's discontents with her pretty granddaughter—that was now grown into so fair and blithe a young woman—were never of a lasting nature; and now she would have both Judith and little Willie taste of some ginger-bread of her own baking, and then Judith had again to refuse a sup of the ale that stood on the table, preferring a little water instead. Moreover, when they had got out into the garden, behold! this young man would come also, to convoy them home on their way across the fields. It was a gracious evening, sweet and cool; there was a clear twilight shining over the land; the

elms were dark against the palely luminous sky. And then, as the three of them went across the meadows towards Stratford town, little Willie Hart was entrusted with the care of the spaniel-gentle—that was young and wayward, and possessed with a mad purpose of hunting sparrows—and as the dog kept him running this way and that, he was mostly at some little distance from these other two, and Judith's companion, young Quiney, had every opportunity of speaking with her.

"I sent you a message, Judith," said he, rather timidly, but anxiously watching the expression of her face all the time,—“a token of remembrance—I trust it did not displease you?”

"You should have considered through whose hands it would come," said she, but without regarding him.

"How so?" he asked, in some surprise.

"Why, you knew that Prudence would have to read it."

"And why not, Judith? Why should she not? She is your friend; and I care not who is made aware that—that—well, you know what I mean, dear Judith, but I fear to anger you by saying it. You were not always so hard to please."

There was a touch of reproach in this that she did not like. Besides, was it fair? Of course, she had been kinder to him when he was a mere strip-ling—when they were boy and girl together; but now he had put forth other pretensions; and they stood on a quite different footing; and in his pertinacity he would not understand why she was al-

ways speaking to him of Prudence Shawe, and extolling her gentleness and sweet calm wisdom and goodness. "The idle boy," she would say to herself, "why did God give him such a foolish head that he must needs come fancying me?" And sometimes she was angry because of his dulness and that he would not see; though, indeed, she could not speak quite plainly.

"You should think," said she, on this occasion, with some sharpness, "that these idle verses that you send me are read by Prudence. Well, doubtless, she may not heed that——"

"Why should she heed, Judith?" said he. "'Tis but an innocent part she takes in the matter—a kindness, merely."

She dared not say more; and she was vexed with him for putting this restraint upon her. She turned upon him with a glance of sudden and rather unfriendly scrutiny.

"What is this now that I hear of you?" said she. "Another brawl! A tavern brawl! I marvel you have escaped so long with a whole skin!"

"I know not who carries tales of me to you, Judith," said he, somewhat warmly, "but if you yourself were more friendly you would take care to choose a more friendly messenger. It is always the worst that you hear. If there was a brawl, it was none of my seeking. And if my skin is whole, I thank God I can look after that for myself; I am not one that will be smitten on one cheek and turn the other—like your parson friend."

This did not mend matters much.

"My parson friend?" said she, with some swift colour in her cheeks. "My parson friend is one that has respect for his office, and has a care for his reputation, and lives a peaceable, holy life; would you have him frequent ale-houses and fight with drawers and tapsters? Marry and amen; but I find no fault with the parson's life."

"Nay, that is true, indeed," said he, bitterly; "you can find no fault in the parson—as every one says. But there be others who see with other eyes and would tell you in what he might amend——"

"I care not to know," said she.

"It were not amiss," said he, for he was determined to speak, "it were not amiss if Sir Parson showed a little more honesty in his daily walk—that were not amiss, for one thing."

"In what is he dishonest, then?" said she, instantly, and she turned and faced him with indignant eyes.

Well, he did not quail. His blood was up. This championship of the parson, that he had scarce expected of her, only fired anew certain secret suspicions of his; and he had no mind to spare his rival, whether he were absent or no.

"Why, then, does he miscall the King, and eat the King's bread?" said he, somewhat hotly. "Is it honest to conform in public, and revile in private? I say, let him go forth, as others have been driven forth, if the state of affairs content him not. I say, that they who speak against the King—marry, it were well done to chop the rogues' ears off!—I say they should be ashamed to eat the King's bread!"

"He eats no King's bread!" said Judith—and alas! her eyes had a look in them that pierced him to the heart: it was not the glance he would fain have met with there. "He eats the bread of the Church, that has been despoiled of its possessions again and again by the Crown and the lords; and why should he go forth? He is a minister; is there harm that he should wish to see the services reformed? He is at his post; would you have him desert it, or else keep silent? No, he is no such coward, I warrant you. He will speak his mind; it were ill done of him else!"

"Nay, he can do no harm at all—in your judgment," said he, somewhat sullenly, "if all be true that they say."

"And who is it, then, that should speak of idle tales and the believing of them?" said she, with indignant reproach. "You say I welcome evil stories about you? And you? Are you so quick to put away the idle gossip they bring you about me? Would you not rather believe it? I trow you would as lief believe it as not! That it is to have friends! That it is to have those who should defend you in your absence, but would rather listen to slander against you! But when they speak about women's idle tongues they know little; it is men who are the readiest to listen and to carry evil report and lying!"

"I meant not to anger you, Judith," said he, more humbly.

"Yes, but you have angered me," said she (with her lips becoming tremulous, but only for a second). "What concern have I with Parson Blaise? I would

they that speak against him were as good men and honest as he——”

“Indeed, they speak no ill of him, Judith,” said he (for he was grieved that they were fallen out so, and there was nothing he would not have retracted that so he might win back to her favour again, in however small a degree), “except that he is disputatious, and would lead matters no one knows whither. ’Tis but a few minutes ago that your grandmother there was saying that we should never have peace and quiet in church affairs till the old faith was restored——”

Here, indeed, she pricked up her ears; but she would say no more; she had not forgiven him yet; and she was proud and silent.

“And though I do not hold with that—for there would be a bloody struggle before the Pope could be master in England again—nevertheless, I would have the ministers men of peace, as they profess to be, and loyal to the King, who is at the head of the Church as well as of the realm. However, let it pass. I wish to have no quarrel with you, Judith——”

“How does your business?” said she, abruptly changing the subject.

“Well, excellently well; it is not in that direction that I have any anxiety about the future——”

“Do you give it your time?—you were best take heed, for else it is like to slip away from you,” she said; and he thought she spoke rather coldly, and as if her warning were meant to convey something more than appeared.

And then she added:

"You were at Wilnecote on Tuesday?"

"You must have heard why, Judith," he said; "old Pike was married again that day, and they would have me over to the wedding."

"And on the Wednesday what was there at Bidford, then, that you must needs be gone when my mother sent to you?"

"At Bidford?" said he (and he was sorely puzzled as to whether he should rejoice at these questions as betraying a friendly interest in his affairs, or rather regard them as conveying covert reproof and expressing her dissatisfaction with him and distrust of him). "At Bidford, Judith—well, there was business as well as pleasure there. For you must know that Daniel Hutt is come home for a space from the new settlements in Virginia, and is for taking back with him a number of labourers that are all in due time to make their fortunes there: marry, 'tis a good chance for some of them, for broken men are as welcome as any, and there are no questions asked as to their having been intimate with the constable and the justice. So there was a kind of merry-meeting of Daniel's old friends that was held at the Falcon at Bidford—and the host is a good customer of mine, so it was prudent of me to go thither; and right pleasant was it to hear Daniel Hutt tell of his adventures by sea and shore; and he gave us some of the tobacco that he had brought with him; and to any that will go back with him to Jamestown he promises allotments of land, though at first there will be tough labour, as

he says honestly. Oh, a worthy man is this Daniel Hutt, though as yet his own fortune seems not so secure."

"With such junketings," said she, with ever so slight a touch of coldness, "'tis no wonder you could not spare the time to come and see my father on the evening of his getting home."

"There now, Judith!" he exclaimed. "Would you have me break in upon him at such a busy season when even you yourselves are careful to refrain? It had been ill-mannered of me to do such a thing; but 'twas no heedlessness that led to my keeping away, as you may well imagine."

"It is difficult to know the reasons when friends hold aloof," said she. "You have not been near the house for two or three weeks, as I reckon."

And here again he would have given much to know whether her speech—which was curiously reserved in tone—meant that she had marked these things out of regard for him or that she wished to reprove him.

"I can give you the reasons for that, Judith," said this tall and straight young fellow, who, from time to time, regarded his companion's face with some solicitude, as if he fain would have found some greater measure of friendliness there. "I have not been often to New Place of late because of one I thought I might meet there who would be no better pleased to see me than I him; and—and—perhaps because of another—that I did not know whether she might be the better pleased to have me there or find me stay away——"

"Your reasons are too fine," said she, "I scarce understand them."

"That is because you won't understand; I think I have spoken plain enough ere now, Judith, I make bold to say."

She flushed somewhat at this; but it was no longer in anger. She seemed willing to be on good terms with him, but always in that measured and distant way.

"Willie!" she called. "Come hither, sweetheart!"

With some difficulty her small cousin made his way back to her, dragging the reluctant spaniel so that its head seemed to be in jeopardy.

"He *will* go after the birds, cousin Judith; you will never teach him to follow you."

"I?" she said.

"Willie knows I want you to have the little dog, Judith," her companion said quickly. "I got him for you when I was at Gloucester; 'tis a good breed—true Maltese, I can warrant him; and the fashionable ladies will scarce stir abroad without one to follow them, or to carry with them in their coaches when they ride. Will you take him, Judith?"

She was a little embarrassed.

"'Tis a pretty present," said she, "but you have not chosen the right one to give it to."

"What mean you?" said he.

"Nay, now, have not I the Don?" she said, with greater courage. "He is a sufficient companion if I wish to walk abroad. Why should you not give this little spaniel to one that has no such companion—I mean to Prudence Shawe?"

"To Prudence!" said he, regarding her; for this second introduction of Judith's friend seemed strange, as well as the notion that he should transfer this prized gift to her.

"There, now, is one so gentle and kind to every one and everything that she would tend the little creature with care," she continued. "It would be more fitting for her than for me."

"You could be kind enough, Judith—if you chose," said he, under his breath, for Willie Hart was standing by.

"Nay, I have the Don," said she, "that is large, and worldly, and serious, and clumsy withal. Give this little playfellow to Prudence, who is small and neat and gentle like itself; surely that were fitter."

"I had hoped you would have accepted the little spaniel from me, Judith," said he, with very obvious disappointment.

"Moreover," said she, lightly, "two of a trade would never agree; we should have this one and the Don continually quarrelling; and sooner or later the small one would lose its head in the Don's great jaws."

"Why, the mastiff is always chained, and at the barn-gate, Judith," said he. "This one would be within-doors, as your playfellow. But I care not to press a gift."

"Nay, now, be not displeased," said she, gently enough. "I am not unthankful; I think well of your kindness; but it were still better done if you were to change your intention and give the spaniel to one that would have a gentler charge over it, and

think none the less of it, as I can vouch for. Pray you, give it to Prudence."

"A discarded gift is not worth the passing on," said he; and as they were now come quite near to the town, where there was a dividing of ways, he stopped as though he would shake hands and depart.

"Will you not go on to the house? You have not seen my father since his coming home," she said.

"No, not to-night, Judith," he said. "Doubtless he is still busy; and I have affairs elsewhere."

She glanced at him with one of those swift keen looks of hers.

"Where go you to spend the evening, if I may make so bold?" she said.

"Not at the ale-house, as you seem to suspect," he answered, with just a trifle of bitterness; and then he took the string to lead away the spaniel; and bade her farewell—in a kind of half-hearted and disappointed and downcast way—and left.

She looked after him for a second or so, as she fastened a glove button that had got loose. And then she sighed as she turned away.

"Sweetheart Willie," said she, putting her hand softly on the boy's shoulder, as he walked beside her, "I think you said you loved me?"

"Why, you know I do, cousin Judith," said he.

"What a pity it is, then," said she, absently, "that you cannot remain always as you are—and keep your ten years for ever and a day—so that we should always be friends as we are now?"

He did not quite know what she meant; but he was sufficiently well pleased and contented when he was thus close by her side; and when her hand was on his shoulder or on his neck it was to him no burden but a delight. And so walking together, and with some gay and careless prattle between them, they went on and into the town.

CHAPTER IX.

THROUGH THE MEADOWS.

SOME two or three days after that, and towards the evening, Prudence Shawe was in the churchyard; and she was alone, save that now and again some one might pass along the gravelled pathway; and these did not stay to interrupt her. She had with her a basket, partly filled with flowers; also, a small rake and a pair of gardener's shears; and she was engaged in going from grave to grave, here putting a few fresh blossoms to replace the withered ones, and there removing weeds, or cutting the grass smooth, and generally tending those last resting-places with a patient and loving care. It was a favourite employment with her when she had a spare afternoon; nor did she limit her attention to the graves of those whom she had known in life; her charge was a general one; and when they who had friends or relatives buried there came to the church of a Sunday morning, and perhaps from some distance, and when they saw that some gentle hand had been employed there in the interval, they knew right well that that hand was the hand of Prudence Shawe. It was a strange fancy on the part of one who was so averse from all ornament or decoration in ordinary life that nothing was too beautiful for a

grave. She herself would not wear a flower; but her best—and the best she could beg or borrow anywhere—she freely gave to those that were gone away; she seemed to have some vague imagination that our poor human nature was not worthy of this beautifying care until it had become sanctified by the sad mystery of death.

It was a calm, golden-white evening, peaceful and silent; the rooks were cawing in the dark elms above her; the swallows dipping and darting under the boughs; the smooth-flowing yellow river was like glass, save that now and again the perfect surface was broken by the rising of a fish. Over there in the wide meadows beyond the stream a number of boys were playing at rounders or prisoner's base or some such noisy game; but the sound of their shouting was softened by the distance; so quiet was it here, as she continued at her pious task, that she might almost have heard herself breathing. And once or twice she looked up, and glanced towards the little gate as if expecting some one.

It was Judith, of course, that she was expecting; and at this moment Judith was coming along to the churchyard to seek her out. What a contrast there was between these two—this one pale and gentle and sad-eyed, stooping over the mute graves in the shadow of the elms; that other coming along through the warm evening light, with all her usual audacity of gait, the peach-bloom of health on her cheek, carelessness and content in her clear-shining eyes, and the tune of "Green Sleeves" ringing through a perfectly idle brain. Indeed, what part of her brain

may not have been perfectly idle was bent solely on mischief. Prudence had been away for two or three days, staying with an ailing sister. All that story of the adventure with the unfortunate young gentleman had still to be related to her. And again and again Judith had pictured to herself Prudence's alarm and the look of her timid eyes when she should hear of such doings, and had resolved that the tale should lose nothing in the telling. Here, indeed, was something for two country maidens to talk about. The even current of their lives was broken but by few surprises; but here was something more than a surprise—something with suggestions of mystery and even danger behind it. This was no mere going out to meet a wizard. Any farm-wench might have an experience of that kind; any ploughboy deluded by the hope of digging up silver in one of his master's fields. But a gentleman in hiding—one that had been at Court—one that had seen the King sitting in his chair of state, while Ben Jonson's masque was opened out before the great and noble assemblage—this was one to speak about, truly; one whose fortunes and circumstances were like to prove a matter of endless speculation and curiosity.

But when Judith drew near to the little gate of the churchyard, and saw how Prudence was occupied, her heart smote her.

“Green-sleeves was all my joy,
Green-sleeves was my delight,”

went clean out of her head. There was a kind of

shame on her face; and when she went along to her friend she could not help exclaiming—

“How good you are, Prue!”

“I?” said the other, with some touch of wonder in the upturned face. “I fear that cannot be said of any of us, Judith.”

“I would I were like you, sweetheart,” was the answer—with a bit of a sigh.

“Like me, Judith?” said Prudence, returning to her task (which was nearly ended now, for she had but few more flowers left). “Nay, what makes you think that? I wish I were far other than I am.”

“Look now,” Judith said, “how you are occupied at this moment. Is there another in Stratford that has such a general kindness? How many would think of employing their time so—how many would come away from their own affairs——?”

“It may be that I have more idle time than many,” said Prudence, with a slight flush. “But I commend not myself for this work; in truth, no; ’tis but a pastime; ’tis for my own pleasure.”

“Indeed, then, good Prue, you are mistaken; and that I know well,” said the other, peremptorily. “Your own pleasure? Is it no pleasure, then, think you, for them that come from time to time, and are right glad to see that some one has been tending the graves of their friends or kinsmen? And do you think, now, it is no pleasure to the poor people themselves—I mean them that are gone—to look at you as you are engaged so, and to think that they are not quite forgotten? Surely it must be a pleasure to them. Surely they cannot have lost all their

interest in what happens here—in Stratford—where they lived; and surely they must be grateful to you for thinking of them, and doing them this kindness? I say it were ill done of them else. I say they ought to be thankful to you. And no doubt they are, could we but learn.”

“Judith, Judith, you have such a bold way of regarding what is all a mystery to us,” said her gentle-eyed friend. “Sometimes you frighten me.”

“I would I knew now,” said the other, looking absently across the river to the boys that were playing there, “whether my little brother Hamnet—had you known him you would have loved him as I did, Prudence—I say I wish I knew whether he is quite happy and content where he is, or whether he would not rather be over there now with the other boys. If he looks down and sees them, may it not make him sad sometimes?—to be so far away from us. I always think of him as being alone there; and he was never alone here. I suppose he thinks of us sometimes. Whenever I hear the boys shouting like that at their play I think of him; but indeed he was never noisy and unruly; my father used to call him the girl-boy: but he was fonder of him than of all us others; he once came all the way from London when he heard that Hamnet was lying sick of a fever.”

She turned to see how Prudence was getting on with her work; but she was in no hurry; and Prudence was patient and scrupulously careful; and the dead, had they been able to speak, would not have

bade her cease and go away, for a gentler hand never touched a grave.

"I suppose it is Grandmother Hathaway who will go next," Judith continued, in the same absent kind of way; "but indeed she says she is right well content either to go or to stay; for now, as she says, she has about as many kinsfolk there as here, and she will not be going among strangers. And well I know she will make for Hamnet as soon as she is there; for like my father's love for Bess Hall was her love for the boy while he was with us. Tell me, Prudence, has he grown up to be of my age? You know we were twins. Is he a man now, so that we should see him as some one different? Or is he still our little Hamnet, just as we used to know him?"

"How can I tell you, Judith?" the other said, almost in pain. "You ask such bold questions; and all these things are hidden from us and behind a veil."

"But these are what one would like to know," said Judith, with a sigh. "Nay, if you could but tell me of such things, then you might persuade me to have a greater regard for the preachers; but when you come and ask about such real things they say it is all a mystery; they cannot tell; and would have you be anxious about schemes of doctrine, which are but strings of words. My father, too: when I go to him—nay, but it is many a day since I tried—he would look at me and say, 'What is in your brain now? To your needle, wench, to your needle!'"

"And naturally, Judith! such things are merci-

fully hidden from us now; but they will be revealed when it is fitting for us to know them. How could our ordinary life be possible if we knew what was going on in the other world? We should have no interest in the things around us; the greater interest would be so great."

"Well, well, well," said Judith, coming with more practical eyes to the present moment, "are you finished, sweet mouse, and will you come away? What, not satisfied yet? I wonder if they know the care you take. I wonder if one will say to the other, 'Come and see; she is there again. We are not quite forgotten.' And will you do that for me, too, dear Prue? Will you put some pansies on my grave, too?—and I know you will say out of your charity, 'Well, she was not good and pious, as I would have had her to be; she had plenty of faults; but at least she often wished to be better than she was.' Nay, I forgot," she added, glancing carelessly over to the church, "they say we shall lie among the great people, since my father bought the tithes—that we have the right to be buried in the chancel; but indeed I know I would an hundred times liefer have my grave in the open here among the grass and the trees."

"You are too young to have such thoughts as these, Judith," said her companion as she rose and shut down the lid of the now empty basket. "Come, shall we go?"

"Let us cross the foot-bridge, Prue," Judith said, "and go through the meadows and round by Clop-ton's bridge and so home; for I have that to tell

you will take some time: pray Heaven it startle you not of your senses withal!"

It was not, however, until they had got away from the churchyard and were out in the clear golden light of the open that she began to tell her story. She had linked her arm within that of her friend. Her manner was grave; and if there was any mischief in her eyes, it was of a demure kind, not easily detected. She confessed that it was out of mere wanton folly that she had gone to the spot indicated by the wizard; and without any very definite hope or belief. But as chance would have it, she did encounter a stranger—one, indeed, that was coming to her father's house. Then followed a complete and minute narrative of what the young man had said—the glimpses he had given her of his present condition, both on the occasion of that meeting and of the subsequent one; and how she had obtained his permission to state these things to this gentle gossip of hers. Prudence listened in silence, her eyes cast down; Judith could not see the gathering concern on her face. Nay, the latter spoke rather in a tone of raillery; for, having had time to look back over the young gentleman's confessions, and his manner and so forth, she had arrived at a kind of assurance that he was in no such desperate case. There were many reasons why a young man might wish to lie perdu for a time; but this one had not talked as if any very imminent danger threatened him; at least, if he had intimated as much, the impression produced upon her was not permanent. And if Judith now told the story with

a sort of careless bravado—as if going forth in secret to meet this stranger was a thing of risk and hazard—it was with no private conviction that there was any particular peril in the matter, but rather with the vague fancy that the adventure looked daring and romantic, and would appear as something terrible in the eyes of her timid friend.

But what now happened startled her. They were going up the steps of the foot-bridge, Prudence first; and Judith following her, had just got to the end of her story. Prudence suddenly turned round, and her face, now opposed to the westering light, was, as Judith instantly saw, quite aghast.

“But, Judith, you do not seem to understand!” she exclaimed. “Was not that the very stranger the wizard said you would meet?—the very hour, the very place? In good truth, it must have been so! Judith, what manner of man have you been in company with?”

For an instant a flush of colour overspread Judith’s face; and she said, with a sort of embarrassed laugh—

“Well, and if it were so, sweet mouse? If that were the appointed one, what then?”

She was on the bridge now. Prudence caught her by both hands; and there was an anxious and piteous appeal in the loving eyes.

“Dear Judith, I beseech you, be warned! Have nothing to do with the man! Did I not say that mischief would come of planting the charm in the churchyard, and shaming a sacred place with such heathenish magic? And now, look already—here is

one that you dare not speak of to your own people; he is in secret correspondence with you; Heaven alone knows what dark deeds he may be bent upon, or what ruin he may bring upon you and yours. Judith, you are light-hearted and daring and you love to be venturesome, but I know you better than you know yourself, sweetheart; you would not willingly do wrong, or bring harm on those that love you; and for the sake of all of us—Judith!—have nothing to do with this man.”

Judith was embarrassed, and perhaps a trifle remorseful; she had not expected her friend to take this adventure so very seriously.

“Dear Prue, you alarm yourself without reason,” she said (but there was still some tell-tale colour in her face). “Indeed, there is no magic or witchery about the young man. Had I seen a ghost I should have been frightened, no doubt, for all that Don Roderigo was with me; and had I met one of the Stratford youths at the appointed place I should have said that perhaps the good wizard had guessed well; but this was merely a stranger coming to see my father; and the chance that brought us together—well, what magic was in that?—it would have happened to you had you been walking in the lane: do you see that, dear mouse?—it would have happened to yourself had you been walking in the lane, and he would have asked of you the question that he asked of me! Nay, banish that fancy, good gossip, else I should be ashamed to do anything further for the young man, that is unfortunate, and very grateful withal for a few words of friendliness.

And so fairly-spoken a young man, too; and so courtly in his bearing; and of such a handsome presence——”

“But, dear Judith, listen to me!—do not be led into such peril! Know you not that evil spirits can assume goodly shapes—the Prince of Darkness himself——”

She could not finish what she had to say—her imagination was so filled with terror.

“Sweet Puritan,” said Judith, with a smile, “I know well that he goeth about like a raging lion, seeking whom he may devour; I know it well; but believe me it would not be worth his travail to haunt such a lonely and useless place as the lane that goes from Shottery to the Bidford road. Nay, but I will convince you, dear mouse, by the best of all evidence, that there is nothing ghostly or evil about the young man; you shall see him, Prue—indeed you must and shall—when that he comes back to his hiding I will contrive that you shall see him and have speech with him, and sure you will pity him as much as I do. Poor young gentleman, that he should be suspected of being Satan! Nay, how could he be Satan, Prue, and be admitted to the King’s Court? Hath not our good King a powerful insight into the doings of witches and wizards and the like; and think you he would allow Satan in person to come into the very banqueting hall to see a masque?”

“Judith, Judith,” said the other piteously, “when you strive against me with your wit, I cannot answer you; but my heart tells me you are in exceeding

danger. I would warn you, dear cousin; I were no true friend to you else."

"But you are the best and truest of friends, you dearest Prue," said Judith, lightly, as she released her hands from her companion's earnest grasp. "Come, let us on—or we shall go supperless for the evening."

She passed along and over the narrow bridge, and down the steps on the other side. She did not seem much impressed by Prudence's entreaties; indeed, she was singing aloud:

"Hey, good fellow, I drink to thee,
Pardonnez-moi, je vous en prie;
To all good fellows where'er they be,
With never a penny of monie!"

Prudence overtook her.

"Judith," said she, "even if he be not of that fearful kind—even if he be a real man, and such as he represents himself, bethink you what you are doing! There may be another such gathering as that at Dunchurch; and would you be in correspondence with a plotter and murderer? Nay, what was't you asked of me the other day?" she added suddenly; and she stood still to confront her friend, with a new alarm in her eyes. "Did you not ask whether your father was well affected towards the Papists? Is there another plot?—another treason against the King?—and you would harbour one connected with such a wicked, godless, and bloodthirsty plan?"

"Nay, nay, sweet mouse! Have I not told you? He declares he has naught to do with any such en-

terprise; and if you would but see him, Prudence, you would believe him. Sure I am that you would believe him instantly. Why, now, there be many reasons why a young gentleman might wish to remain concealed——”

“None, Judith, none?” the other said, with decision. “Why should an honest man fear the daylight?”

“Oh, as for that,” was the careless answer, “there be many an honest man that has got into the clutches of the twelve-in-the-hundred rogues; and when the writs are out against such an one, I hold it no shame that he would rather be out of the way than be thrown among the wretches in Bocardo. I know well what I speak of; many a time have I heard my father and your brother talk of it; how the rogues of usurers will keep a man in prison for twelve years for a matter of sixteen shillings—what is it they call it?—making dice of his bones? And if the young gentleman fear such treatment and the horrible company of the prisons, I marvel not that he should prefer the fresh air of Bidford, howsoever dull the life at the farm may be.”

“And if that were all, why should he fear to bring the letter to your father?” the other said, with a quick glance of suspicion: she did not like the way in which Judith’s ready brain could furnish forth such plausible conjectures and excuses. “Answer me that, Judith. Is your father one likely to call aloud and have the man taken, if that be all that is against him? Why should he be afraid to bring the letter from your father’s friend? Nay,

why should he be on the way to the house with it, and thereafter stop short and change his mind? There be many a mile betwixt London and Stratford; 'tis a marvellous thing he should travel all that way and change his mind within a few minutes of being in the town. I love not such dark ways, Judith; no good thing can come of them, but evil; and it were ill done of you—even if you be careless of danger to yourself, as I trow you mostly are—I say it is ill done of you to risk the peace of your family by holding such dangerous converse with a stranger and one that may bring harm to us all.”

Judith was not well pleased; her mouth became rather proud.

“Marry, if this be your Christian charity I would not give a penny ballad for it!” said she, with some bitterness of tone. “I had thought the story had another teaching—I mean the story of him that fell among thieves and was beaten and robbed and left for dead; and that we were to give a helping hand to such, like the Samaritan. But now I mind me 'twas the Priest that passed by on the other side—yes, the Priest and the Levite—the godly ones who would preserve a whole skin for themselves and let the other die of his wounds for aught they cared! And here is a young man in distress—alone and friendless—and when he would have a few words of cheerfulness, or a message, or a scrap of news as to what is going on in the world—— No, no, say the Priest and the Levite—go not near him—because he is in misfortune he is dangerous—be-

cause he is alone he is a thief and a murderer—perchance a pirate, like Captain Ward and Dansekar, or even Catesby himself come alive again. I say God keep us all from such Christian charity!”

“You use me ill, Judith,” said the other, and then was silent.

They walked on through the meadows, and Judith was watching the play of the boys. As she did so, a leather ball, struck a surprising distance, came rolling almost to her feet, and forthwith one of the lads came running after it. She picked it up and threw it to him—threw it awkwardly and clumsily as a girl throws, but nevertheless she saved him some distance and time, and she was rewarded with many a loud “Thank you!—thank you!” from the side who were out. But when they got past the players and their noise, Prudence could no longer keep silent; she had a forgiving disposition, and nothing distressed her so much as being on unfriendly terms with Judith.

“You know I meant not that, dear Judith,” said she. “I only meant to shield you from harm.”

As for Judith, all such trivial and temporary clouds of misunderstanding were instantly swallowed up in the warm and radiant sunniness of her nature. She broke into a laugh.

“And so you shall, dear cousin,” said she, gaily, “you shall shield me from the reproach of not having a common and ordinary share of humanity; that shall you, dear Prue, should the unfortunate young gentleman come into the neighbourhood again; for you will read to me the message that he sends

me; and together we will devise somewhat on his behalf. No? Are you afraid to go forth and meet the private Dansekar? Do you expect to find the ghost of Gamaliel Ratsey walking on the Evesham road? Such silly fears, dear Prue, do not become you; you are no longer a child."

"You are laying too heavy a burden on me, Judith," the other said, rather sadly. "I know not what to do; and you say I may not ask counsel of any one. And if I do nothing, I am still taking a part."

"What part, then, but to read a few words and hold your peace?" said her companion, lightly. "What is that? But I know you will not stay there, sweet mouse. No, no; your heart is too tender; I know you would not willingly do any one an injury, or harbour suspicion and slander; you shall come and see the young gentleman, good Prue, as I say; and then you will repent in sackcloth and ashes for all that you have urged against him. And perchance it may be in New Place that you shall see him——"

"Ah, Judith, that were well!" exclaimed the other, with a brighter light on her face.

"What? Would you desire to see him, if he were to pay us a visit?" Judith said, regarding her with a smile.

"Surely, surely, after what you have told me: why not, Judith?" was the placid answer.

"There would be nothing ghostly about him then?"

"There would be no secret, Judith," said Pru-

dence, gravely, "that you have to keep back from your own people."

"Well, well, we will see what the future holds for us," said Judith, in the same careless fashion. "And if the young gentleman come not back to Stratford, why, then, good fortune attend him wherever he may be; for one that speaks so fair and is so modest sure deserves it. And if he come not back, then shall your heart be all the lighter, dear Prue; and as for mine, mine will not be troubled—only, that I wish him well, as I say, and would fain hear of his better estate. So all is so far happily settled; and you may go in to supper with me with untroubled eyes and a free conscience: marry, there be need for that, as I bethink me, for Master Parson comes this evening, and you know you must have a pure and joyful heart with you, good Prudence, when you enter into the congregation of the saints."

"Judith, for my sake!"

"Nay, I meant not to offend, truly; it was my wicked idle tongue, that I must clap a bridle on now—for listen! ——"

They were come to New Place. There was singing going forward within, and one or two of the casements were open; but perhaps it was the glad and confident nature of the psalm that led to the words being so clearly heard without:

"The man is blest that hath not bent
To wicked rede his ear;
Nor led his life as sinners do,
Nor sat in scorner's chair.

But in the law of God the Lord
Doth set his whole delight;
And in that law doth exercise
Himself both day and night.

He shall be like the tree that groweth
Fast by the river's side;
Which bringeth forth most pleasant fruit
In her due time and tide;
Whose leaf shall never fade nor fall,
But flourish still and stand:
Even so all things shall prosper well
That this man takes in hand."

And so, having waited until the singing ceased, they entered into the house, and found two or three neighbours assembled there; and Master Walter was just about to begin his discourse on the godly life, and the substantial comfort and sweet peace of mind pertaining thereto.

Some few days after this, and towards the hour of noon, the mail-bearer came riding post-haste into the town; and in due course the contents of his saddle-bags were distributed among the folk entitled to them. But before the news-letters had been carefully spelled out to the end a strange rumour got abroad. The French King was slain, and by the hand of an assassin. Some, as the tidings passed quickly from mouth to mouth, said the murderer was named Ravelok, others Havelok; but as to the main fact of the fearful crime having been committed there was no manner of doubt. Naturally the bruit of this affair presently reached

Julius Shawe's house; and when the timid Prudence heard of it—and when she thought of the man who had been in hiding, and who had talked with Judith, and had been so suddenly and secretly summoned away—her face grew even paler than its wont, and there was a sickly dread at her heart. She would go to see Judith at once; and yet she scarcely dared to breathe even to herself the terrible forebodings that were crowding in on her mind.

CHAPTER X.

A PLAYHOUSE.

BUT Judith laughed aside these foolish fears: as it happened, far more important matters were just at this moment occupying her mind.

She was in the garden. She had brought out some after-dinner fragments for the Don; and while the great dun-coloured beast devoured these, she had turned from him to regard Matthew gardener; and there was a sullen resentment on her face; for it seemed to her imagination that he kept doggedly and persistently near the summer-house, on which she had certain dark designs. However, the instant she caught sight of Prudence her eyes brightened up, and, indeed, became full of an eager animation.

"Hither, hither, good Prue!" she exclaimed hurriedly. "Quick, quick! I have news for you!"

"Yes, indeed, Judith!" said the other; and at the same moment Judith came to see there was something wrong—the startled pale face and frightened eyes had a story to tell.

"Why, what is to do?" said she.

"Know you not, Judith? Have you not heard? The French king is slain—is murdered by an assassin!"

To her astonishment the news seemed to produce no effect whatever.

"Well, I am sorry for the poor man," Judith said, with perfect self-possession. "They that climb high must risk a sudden fall. But why should that alarm you, good gossip? Or have you other news that comes more nearly home?"

And then, when Prudence almost breathlessly revealed the apprehensions that had so suddenly filled her mind, Judith would not even stay to discuss such a monstrous possibility. She laughed it aside altogether. That the courteous young gentleman who had come with a letter from Ben Jonson should be concerned in the assassination of the King of France was entirely absurd and out of the question.

"Nay, nay, dear Prue," said she, lightly, "you shall make him amends for these unjust suspicions; that you shall, all in good time. But listen now: I have weightier matters; I have eggs on the spit, beshrew me else! Can you read me this riddle, Prue? Know you by these tokens what has happened? My father comes in to dinner to-day in the gayest of humours; there is no absent staring at the window, and forgetting of all of us; it is all merriment this time; and he must needs have Bess Hall to sit beside him; and he would charge her with being a witch; and reproach her for our simple meal, when that she might have given us a banquet like that of a London Company, with French dishes, and silver flagons of Theologicum, and a memorial to tell each of us what was coming. And

then he would miscall your brother—which you know, dear Prudence, he never would do were he in earnest—and said he was chamberlain now, and was conspiring to be made alderman, only that he might sell building materials to the corporation and so make money out of his office. And I know not what else of jests and laughing; but at length he sent to have the Evesham roan saddled; and he said that when once he had gone along to the sheep-wash to see that the hurdles were rightly up for the shearing, he would give all of the rest of the day to idleness—to idleness wholly; and perchance he might ride over to Broadway to see the shooting-match going forward there. Now, you wise one, can you guess what has happened? Know you what is in store for us? Can you read me the riddle?”

“I see no riddle, Judith,” said the other, with puzzled eyes. “I met your father as I came through the house, and he asked if Julius were at home: doubtless he would have him ride to Broadway with him!”

“Good gossip, is that your skill at guessing? But listen, now”—and here she dropped her voice as she regarded wiseman Matthew, though that personage seemed busily enough occupied with his watering-can,—“this is what has happened: I know the signs of the weather. Be sure he has finished the play—the play that the young Prince Mamilius was in: you remember, Prudence?—and the large fair copy is made out and locked away in the little cupboard, against my father’s next going to London;

and the loose sheets are thrown into the oak chest along with the others. And now, good Prue, sweet Prue, do you know what you must manage? Indeed I dare not go near the summer-house while that ancient wiseman is loitering about; and you must coax him; you must get him away; sometimes I see his villain eyes watching me, as if he had suspicion in his mind——”

“’Tis your own guilty conscience, Judith,” said Prudence, but with a smile; for she had herself connived at this offence ere now.

“By fair means or foul, sweetheart, you must get him away to the other end of the garden,” said she, eagerly; “for now the Don has nearly finished his dinner, and goodman-wiseman-fool will wonder if we stay longer here. Nay, I have it, cousin; you must get him along to the corner where my mother grows her simples; and you must keep him there for a space, that I may get out the right papers; and this is what you must do; you will ask him for something that sounds like Latin—no matter what nonsense it may be; and he will answer you that he knows it right well, but has none of it at the present time; and you will say that you have surely seen it among my mother’s simples, and thus you will lead him away to find it, and the longer you seek the better. Do you understand, good Prue?—and quick, quick!”

Prudence’s pale face flushed.

“You ask too much, Judith. I cannot deceive the poor man so.”

"Nay, nay, you are too scrupulous. A trifle—a mere trifle!"

And then Prudence happened to look up, and she met Judith's eyes; and there was such frank self-confidence and audacity in them, and also such a singular and clear-shining beauty that the simple Puritan was in a manner bedazzled. She said, with a quiet smile, as she turned away her head again—

"Well, I marvel not, Judith, that you can bewitch the young men, and bewilder their understanding. 'Tis easy to see—if they have eyes and regard you, they are lost; but how you have your own way with all of us, and how you override our judgment, and do with us what you please, that passes me. Even Dr. Hall: for whom else would he have brought from Coventry the green silk stockings and green velvet shoes?—you know such vanities find little favour in his own home——"

"Quick, quick, sweetheart, muzzle me that gaping ancient!" said Judith, interrupting her. "The Don has finished; and I will dart into the summer-house as I carry back the dish. Detain him, Prue; speak a word or two of Latin to him; he will swear he understands you right well, though you yourself understand not a word of it——"

"I may not do all you ask, Judith," said the other, after a moment's reflection (and still with an uneasy feeling that she was yielding to the wiles of a temptress), "but I will ask the goodman to show me your mother's simples and how they thrive."

A minute or two thereafter Judith had swiftly stolen into the summer-house—which was spacious

and substantial of its kind, and contained a small black cupboard fixed up in a corner of the walls, a table and chair, and a long oak chest on the floor. It was this last that held the treasure she was in search of; and now, the lid having been raised, she was down on one knee, carefully selecting from a mass of strewn papers (indeed there were a riding-whip, a sword and sword belt, and several other articles mixed up in this common receptacle) such sheets as were without a minute mark which she had invented for her own private purposes. These secured and hastily hidden in her sleeve, she closed the lid, and went out into the open again; calling upon Prudence to come to her, for that she was going into the house.

They did not, however, remain within doors at New Place, for that might have been dangerous; they knew of a far safer resort. Just behind Julius Shawe's house, and between that and the garden, there was a recess formed by the gable of a large barn not quite reaching the adjacent wall. It was a three-sided retreat, overlooked by no window whatsoever; there was a frail wooden bench on two sides of it; and the entrance to it was partly blocked up by an empty cask that had been put there to be out of the way. For outlook there was nothing but a glimpse of the path going into the garden, a bit of greensward, and two apple-trees between them and the sky. It was not a noble theatre, this little den behind the barn; but it had produced for these two many a wonderful pageant; for the empty barrel and the bare barn wall and the two trees would at

one time be transformed into the forest of Arden, and Rosalind would be walking there, in her pretty page costume, and laughing at the love-sick Orlando; and again they would form the secret haunts of Queen Titania and her court, with the jealous Oberon chiding her for her refusal; and again they would become the hall of a great northern castle, with trumpets and cannon sounding without as the King drank to Hamlet. Indeed the elder of these two young women had an extraordinarily vivid imagination; she saw the things and people as if they were actually there before her; she realised their existence so intensely that even Prudence was brought to sympathise with them, and to follow their actions now with hot indignation and now with triumphant delight over good fortune come at last. There was no stage-carpenter there to distract them with his dismal expedients; no actor to thrust his physical peculiarities between them and the poet's ethereal visions; the dream-world was before them, clear and filled with light; and Prudence's voice was gentle and of a musical kind. Nay, sometimes Judith would leap to her feet. "You shall not!—you shall not!" she would exclaim, as if addressing some strange visitant that was showing the villainy of his mind; and tears came quickly to her eyes if there was a tale of pity; and the joy and laughter over lovers reconciled brought warm colour to her face. They forgot that these walls that enclosed them were of gray mud; they forgot that the prevailing odour in the air was that of the malt in the barn; for now they were regarding Romeo in the moon-

light, with the dusk of the garden around, and Juliet uttering her secrets to the honeyed night; and again they were listening to the awful voices of the witches on the heath, and guessing at the sombre thoughts passing through the mind of Macbeth; and then again they were crying bitterly when they saw before them an old man, gray-haired, discrowned, and witless, that looked from one to the other of those standing by, and would ask who the sweet lady was that sought with tears for his benediction. They could hear the frail and shaken voice—

“Methinks I should know you, and know this man,
Yet I am doubtful:—for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is; and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.”

And now, as they had retired into this sheltered nook, and Prudence was carefully placing in order the scattered sheets that had been given her, Judith was looking on with some compunction.

“Indeed I grieve to give you so much trouble, sweetheart,” said she. “I would I could get at the copy that my father has locked away——”

“Judith!” her friend said, reproachfully. “You would not take that? Why, your father will scarce show it even to Julius, and sure I am that none in the house would put a hand upon it——”

“If it were a book of psalms and paraphrases they might be of another mind,” Judith said; but Prudence would not hear.

"Nay," said she, as she continued to search for the connecting pages, "I have heard your father say to Julius that there is but little difference; and that 'tis only when he has leisure here in Stratford that he makes this copy writ out fair and large; in London he takes no such pains. Truly, I would not that either my brother or any of his acquaintance knew of my fingering in such a matter; what would they say, Judith? And sometimes, indeed, my mind is ill at ease with regard to it—that I should be reading to you things that so many godly people denounce as wicked and dangerous——"

"You are too full of fears, cousin," said Judith, coolly; "and too apt to take the good people at their word. Nay, I have heard, they will make you out everything to be wicked and sinful that is not to their own minds; and they are zealous among the saints; but I have heard,—I have heard."

"What, then?" said the other, with some faint colour in her face.

"No matter," said Judith, carelessly. "Well, I have heard that when they make a journey to London they are as fond of claret-wine and oysters as any; but no matter: in truth the winds carry many a thing not worth the listening to. But as regards this special wickedness, good gossip, indeed you are innocent of it; 'tis all laid to my charge; I am the sinner and temptress; be sure you shall not suffer one jot through my iniquity. And now have you got them all together? Are you ready to begin?"

"But you must tell me where the story ceased, dear Judith, when last we had it; for indeed you

have a marvellous memory, even to the word and the letter. The poor babe that was abandoned on the sea-shore had just been found by the old shepherd—went it not so?—and he was wondering at the rich bearing-cloth it was wrapped in. Why, here is the name—Perdita—” she continued, as she rapidly scanned one or two of the pages—“who is now grown up, it appears, and in much grace; and this is a kind of introduction, I take it, to tell you all that has happened since your father last went to London—I mean since the story was broken off. And Florizel—I remember not the name—but here he is so named as the son of the King of Bohemia——”

A quick laugh of intelligence rose to Judith’s eyes; she had an alert brain.

“Prince Florizel?” she exclaimed. “And Princess Perdita! That were a fair match, in good sooth, and a way to heal old differences! But to the beginning, sweetheart, I beseech you; let us hear how the story is to be; and pray Heaven he gives me back my little Mamillius, that was so petted and teased by the Court ladies.”

However, as speedily appeared, she had anticipated too easy a continuation and conclusion. The young Prince Florizel proved to be enamoured, not of one of his own station, but of a simple shepherdess; and, although she instantly guessed that this shepherdess might turn out to be the forsaken Perdita, the conversation between King Polixenes and the good Camillo still left her in doubt. As for the next scene—the encounter between Autolycus and the country clown—Judith wholly and somewhat

sulkily disapproved of that. She laughed, it is true; but it was sorely against her will. For she suspected that Goodman Matthew's influence was too apparent here; and that, were he ever to hear of the story, he would in his vanity claim this part as his own; moreover, there was a kind of familiarity and everyday feeling in the atmosphere—why, she herself had been rapidly questioned by her father about the necessary purchases for a sheep-shearing feast, and Susan, laughing, had struck in with the information as to the saffron for colouring the warden pies. But when the sweet-voiced Prudence came to the scene between Prince Florizel and the pretty shepherdess, then Judith was right well content.

“Oh, do you see, now, how her gentle birth shines through her lowly condition!” she said quickly. “And when the old shepherd finds that he has been ordering a king's daughter to be the mistress of the feast—ay, and soundly rating her, too, for her bashful ways—what a fright will seize the good old man! And what says she in answer?—again, good Prue—let me hear it again—marry, now, I'll be sworn she had just such another voice as yours!”

“To the King Polixenes,” Prudence continued, regarding the manuscript, “who is in disguise, you know, Judith, she says—

‘Sir, welcome;
It is my father's will I should take on me
The hostess-ship o' the day: you're welcome, sir.’

And then to both the gentlemen:

‘Give me those flowers there, Dorcas. Reverend sirs,
For you there's rosemary and rue; these keep

Seeming and savour all the winter long:
Grace and remembrance be to you both,
And welcome to our shearing.'"

"Ah, there, now, will they not be won by her gentleness?" she cried eagerly. "Will they not suspect and discover the truth? It were a new thing for a prince to wed a shepherdess, but this is no shepherdess, as an owl might see! What say they, then, Prue? Have they no suspicion?"

So Prudence continued her patient reading—in the intense silence that was broken only by the twittering of the birds in the orchard, or the crowing of a cock in some neighbouring yard; and Judith listened keenly, drinking in every varying phrase. But when Florizel had addressed his speech to the pretty hostess of the day, Judith could no longer forbear: she clapped her hands in delight.

"There, now, that is a true lover; that is spoken like a true lover!" she cried, with her face radiant and proud. "Again, good Prue, let us hear what he says—ay, and before them all, too—I warrant me he is not ashamed of her!"

So Prudence had to read once more Florizel's praise of his gentle mistress—

"What you do

Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,

I'd have you do it ever; when you sing,

I'd have you buy and sell so; so give alms;

Pray so; and for the ordering of your affairs,

To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you

A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do

Nothing but that; move still, still so, and own

No other function. Each your doing

So singular in each particular,

Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,
That all your acts be queens!"

"In good sooth, it is spoken like a true lover!" Judith said, with a light on her face as if the speech had been addressed to herself. "Like one that is well content with his sweetheart; and is proud of her; and approves! Marry, there be few of such in these days; for this one is jealous and unreasonable, and would have the mastery too soon; and that one would frighten you to his will by declaring you are on the highway to perdition; and another would have you more civil to his tribe of kinsfolk. But there is a true lover, now; there is one that is courteous and gentle; one that is not afraid to approve: there may be such in Stratford, but, God wot, they would seem to be a scarce commodity! Nay, I pray your pardon, dear Prue: to the story, if it please you—and is there aught of the little Mamillius forthcoming?"

And so the reading proceeded; and Judith was in much delight that the old King seemed to perceive something unusual in the grace and carriage of the pretty Perdita.

"What is't he says? What are the very words?"

"This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever
Ran on the greensward; nothing she does or seems
But smacks of something greater than herself,
Too noble for this place."

"Yes, yes, yes!" she exclaimed, quickly. "And sees he not some likeness to the Queen Hermione? Surely he must remember the poor injured Queen, and see that this is her daughter? Happy daughter, that has a lover that thinks so well of her! And now, Prue!"

But when, in the course of the hushed reading, all these fair hopes came to be cruelly shattered; when the pastoral romance was brought to a sudden end; when the King, disclosing himself, declared a divorce between the unhappy lovers, and was for hanging the ancient shepherd, and would have Perdita's beauty scratched with briers; and when Prudence had to repeat the farewell words addressed to the Prince by his hapless sweetheart—

“ ‘Will't please you, sir, be gone,
I told you what would come of this. Beseech you,
Of your own state take care. This dream of mine
Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch farther,
But milk my ewes; and weep——’ ”

—there was something very like tears in the gentle reader's eyes; but that was not Judith's mood; she was in a tempest of indignation.

“God's my life!” she cried, “was there ever such a fool as this old King? He a king! He to sit on a throne! Better if he sate in a barn and helped madgehowlet to catch mice! And what says the Prince? Nay, I'll be sworn he proves himself a true man, and no summer playfellow; he will stand by her; he will hold to her, let the ancient dotard wag his beard as he please!”

And so, in the end, the story was told, and all happily settled; and Prudence rose from the rude wooden bench with a kind of wistful look on her face, as if she had been far away and seen strange things. Then Judith—pausing for a minute or so as if she would fix the whole thing in her memory, to be thought over afterwards—proceeded to tie

the pages together for the better concealment of them on her way home.

"And the wickedness of it!" said she, lightly. "Wherein lies the wickedness of such a reading, sweet mouse?"

Prudence was somewhat shamefaced on such occasions; she could not honestly say that she regretted as she ought to have done giving way to Judith's importunities.

"Some would answer you, Judith," she said, "that we had but ill used time that was given us for more serious purposes."

"And for what more serious purposes, cousin? For the repeating of idle tales about our neighbours? Or the spending of the afternoon in sleep, as is the custom with many? Are we all so busy, then, that we may not pass a few minutes in amusement? But, indeed, dear Prue," said she, as she gave a little touch to her pretty cap and snow-white ruff, to put them right before she went out into the street, "I mean to make amends this afternoon. I shall be busy enough to make up for whatever loss of time there has been over this dangerous and godless idleness. For, do you know, I have everything ready now for the new Portugal receipts that you read to me; and two of them I am to try as soon as I get home; and my father is to know nothing of the matter—till the dishes be on the table. So fare you well, sweetheart; and give ye good thanks, too: this has been but an evil preparation for the church-going of the morrow, but remember, the sin was mine—you are quit of that."

And then her glance fell on the roll of papers that she held in her hand.

"The pretty Perdita!" said she. "Her beauty was not scratched with briers after all. And I doubt not she was in brave attire at the Court; though methinks I better like to remember her as the mistress of the feast, giving the flowers to this one and that. And happy Perdita, also, to have the young Prince come to the sheep-shearing, and say so many sweet things to her! Is't possible, think you, Prue, there might come such another handsome stranger to our sheep-shearing that is now at hand?"

"I know not what you mean, Judith."

"Why, now, should such things happen only in Bohemia?" she said, gaily, to the gentle and puzzled Prudence. "Soon our shearing will begin, for the weather has been warm, and I hear the hurdles are already fixed. And there will be somewhat of a merry-making, no doubt; and—and the road from Evesham hither is a fair and goodly road, that a handsome young stranger might well come riding along. What then, good mouse? If one were to meet him in the lane that crosses to Shottery—and to bid him to the feast—what then?"

"Oh, Judith, surely you are not still thinking of that dangerous man!" the other exclaimed.

But Judith merely looked toward her for a second—with the clear-shining eyes now become quite demure and inscrutable.

CHAPTER XI.

A REMONSTRANCE.

NEXT morning was Sunday; and Judith, having got through her few domestic duties at an early hour, and being dressed in an especially pretty costume in honour of the holy day, thought she need no longer remain within-doors, but would walk along to the churchyard, where she expected to find Prudence. The latter very often went thither on a Sunday morning, partly for quiet reverie and the recalling of this one and the other of her departed but not forgotten friends, whose names were carven on the tombstones, and partly—if this may be forgiven her—to see how the generous mother earth had responded to her week-day labours in the planting and tending of the graves. But when Judith, idly and carelessly as was her wont, reached the churchyard, she found the wide, silent space quite empty; so she concluded that Prudence had probably been detained by a visit to some one fallen sick; and she thought she might as well wait for her; and with that view—or perhaps out of mere thoughtlessness—she went along to the river-side, and sate down on the low wall there, having before her the slowly-moving yellow stream, and the fair, far-stretching landscape beyond.

There had been some rain during the night; the roads she had come along were miry; and here the grass in the churchyard was dripping with the wet; but there was a kind of suffused rich light abroad that bespoke the gradual breaking through of the sun; and there was a warmth in the moist atmosphere that seemed to call forth all kinds of sweet odours from the surrounding plants and flowers. Not that she needed these; for she had fixed in her bosom a little nosegay of yellow-leaved mint, that was quite sufficient to sweeten the scarcely-moving air. And as she sate there, in the silence, it seemed to her as if all the world were awake—and had been awake for hours—but that all the human beings were gone out of it. The rooks were cawing in the elms above her, the bees hummed as they flew by into the open light over the stream, and far away she could hear the lowing of the cattle on the farms; but there was no sound of any human voice, nor any glimpse of any human creature in the wide landscape. And she grew to wonder what it would be like if she were left alone in the world; all the people gone from it; her own relatives and friends no longer here and around her, but away in the strange region where Hamnet was, and perhaps, on such a morning as this, regarding her, not without pity, and even, it might be, with some touch of half-recalled affection. Which of them all should she regret the most? Which of them all would this solitary creature—left alone in Stratford—in an empty town—most crave for, and feel the want of? Well, she went over these friends and neighbours

and companions and would-be lovers; and she tried to imagine what, in such circumstances, she might think of this one and that; and which of them she would most desire to have back on the earth and living with her. But right well she knew in her heart that all this balancing and choosing was but a pretence. There was but the one; the one whose briefest approval was a kind of heaven to her, and the object of her secret and constant desire; the one who turned aside her affection with a jest; who brought her silks and scents from London as if her mind were set on no other things than these. And she was beginning to wonder whether, in those imagined circumstances, he might come to think differently of her, and to understand her somewhat; and indeed, she was already picturing to herself the life they might lead—these two, father and daughter—together in the empty and silent, but sunlit and sufficiently cheerful town—when her idle reverie was interrupted. There was a sound of talking behind her; doubtless the first of the people were now coming to church, for the doors were already open.

She looked round, and saw that this was Master Walter Blaise who had just come through the little swinging gate, and that he was accompanied by two little girls, one at each side of him and holding his hand. Instantly she turned her head away, pretending not to have seen him.

“Bless the man,” she said to herself, “what does he here of a Sunday morning? Why is so diligent a pastor not in charge of his own flock?”

But she felt secure enough. Not only was he accompanied by the two children, but there was this other safeguard that he would not dare to profane the holy day by attempting anything in the way of wooing. And it must be said that the young parson had had but few opportunities for that—the other members of the household eagerly seeking his society when he came to New Place; and Judith sharp to watch her chances of escape.

The next moment she was startled by hearing a quick footstep behind her. She did not move.

“Give you good morrow, Judith,” said he, presenting himself, and regarding her with his keen and confident gray eyes. “I would crave a word with you; and I trust it may be a word in season, and acceptable to you.”

He spoke with an air of cool authority which she resented. There was nothing of the clownish bashfulness of young Jelleyman about him, nor yet of the half-timid, half-sulky jealousy of Tom Quiney; but a kind of mastery; as if his office gave him the right to speak, and commanded that she should hear. And she did not think this fair; and she distinctly wished to be alone; so that her face had but little welcome in it, and none of the shining radiance of kindness that Willie Hart so worshipped.

“I know you like not hearing of serious things, Judith,” said he (while she wondered whither he had sent the two little girls: perhaps into the church?) “but I were no true friend to you, as I desire to be, if I feared to displease you when there is need.”

“What have I done then? In what have I of-

fended? I know we are all miserable sinners, if that be what you mean," said she, coldly.

"I would not have you take it that way, Judith," said he, and there really was much friendliness in his voice. "I meant to speak kindly to you. Nay; I have tried to understand you; and perchance I do in a measure. You are in the enjoyment of such health and spirits as fall to the lot of few; you are well content with your life and the passing moment; you do not like to be disturbed, or to think of the future. But the future will come, nevertheless; and it may be with altered circumstances; your light-heartedness may cease; sorrow and sickness may fall upon you; and then you may wish you had learned earlier to seek for help and consolation where these alone are to be found. It were well that you should think of such things now, surely; you cannot live always as you live now—I had almost said a godless life, but I do not wish to offend; in truth I would rather lead you in all kindness to what I know is the true pathway to the happiness and peace of the soul. I would speak to you, Judith, if in no other way, as a brother in Christ; I were no true friend to you else; nay, I have the command of the Master whom I serve, to speak and fear not."

She did not answer, but she was better content now. So long as he only preached at her, he was within his province, and within his right.

"And bethink you, Judith," said he, with a touch of reproach in his voice, "how and why it is you enjoy such health and cheerfulness of spirits: surely

through the Lord in His loving-kindness answering the prayers of your pious mother. Your life, one might say, was vouchsafed in answer to her supplications; and do you owe nothing of duty and gratitude to God, and to God's Church, and to God's people? Why should you hold aloof from them? Why should you favour worldly things, and walk apart from the congregation, and live as if to-morrow were always to be as to-day, and as if there were to be no end to life, no calling to account as to how we have spent our time here upon earth? Dear Judith, I speak not unkindly; I wish not to offend; but often my heart is grieved for you; and I would have you think how trifling our present life is in view of the great eternity whither we are all journeying; and I would ask you, for your soul's sake, and for your peace of mind here and hereafter, to join with us, and come closer with us, and partake of our exercises. Indeed you will find a truer happiness. Do you not owe it to us? Have you no gratitude for the answering of your mother's prayers?"

"Doubtless, doubtless," said she (though she would rather have been listening in silence to the singing of the birds, that were all rejoicing now, for the sun had at length cleared away the morning vapours, and the woods and the meadows and the far uplands were all shining in the brilliant new light). "I go to church as the others do; and there we give thanks for all the mercies that have been granted."

"And is it enough, think you?" said he—and

as he stood, while she sate, she did not care to meet those clear, keen, authoritative eyes that were bent on her. "Does your conscience tell you that you give sufficient thanks for what God in His great mercy has vouchsafed to you? Lip-service every seventh day!—a form of words gone through before you take your afternoon walk! Why, if a neighbour were kind to you, you would show him as much gratitude as that; and this is all you offer to the Lord of heaven and earth for having in His compassion listened to your mother's prayers and bestowed on you life and health and a cheerful mind?"

"What would you have me do? I cannot profess to be a saint while at heart I am none," said she, somewhat sullenly.

It was an unlucky question. Moreover, at this moment the bells in the tower sent forth their first throbbing peals into the startled air; and these doubtless recalled him to the passing of time, and the fact that presently the people would be coming into the churchyard.

"I will speak plainly to you, Judith; I take no shame to mention such a matter on the Lord's day; perchance the very holiness of the hour, and of the spot where I have chanced to meet you, will the better incline your heart. You know what I have wished; what your family wish; and indeed you cannot be so blind as not to have seen. It is true I am but a humble labourer in the Lord's vineyard, but I magnify my office; it is an honourable work

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—the saving of souls, the calling to repentance, the carrying of the gospel to the poor and stricken ones of the earth—I say that is an honourable calling, and one that blesses them that partake in it, and gives a peace of mind far beyond what the worldlings dream of. And if I have wished that you might be able and willing—through God’s merciful inclining of your heart—to aid me in this work—to become my helpmate—was it only of my own domestic state I was thinking? Surely not. I have seen you from day to day—careless and content with the trifles and idle things of this vain and profitless world; but I have looked forward to what might befall in the future; and I have desired with all my heart—yea, and with prayers to God for the same—that you should be taught to seek the true haven in time of need. Do you understand me, Judith?”

He spoke with little tenderness—and certainly with no show of lover-like anxiety; but he was in earnest; and she had a terrible conviction pressing upon her that her wit might not be able to save her. The others she could easily elude when she was in the mind; this one spoke close and clear; she was afraid to look up and face his keen, acquisitive eyes.

“And if I do understand you, good Master Blaise,” said she, desperately; “if I do understand you—as I confess I have gathered something of this before—but—but surely—one such as I—such as you say I am—might she not become pious—and seek to have her soul saved—without also having

to marry a parson?—if such be your meaning, good Master Blaise.”

It was she who was in distress and in embarrassment, not he.

“You are not situated as many others are,” said he. “You owe your life, as one may say, to the prayers of God’s people; I but put before you one way in which you could repay the debt—by labouring in the Lord’s vineyard, and giving the health and cheerfulness that have been bestowed on you to the comfort of those less fortunate——”

“I? Such an one as I? Nay, nay, you have shown me how all unfit I were for that,” she exclaimed, glad of this one loophole.

“I will not commend you, Judith, to your face,” said he, calmly, “nor praise such worldly gifts as others, it may be, over-value; but in truth I may say you have a way of winning people towards you; your presence is welcome to the sick; your cheerfulness gladdens the troubled in heart; and you have youth and strength and an intelligence beyond that of many. Are all these to be thrown away?—to wither and perish as the years go by? Nay, I seek not to urge my suit to you by idle words of wooing, as they call it, or by allurements of flattery; these are the foolish devices of the ballad-mongers and the players; and are well-fitted, I doubt not, for the purposes of the master of these, the father of lies himself; rather would I speak to you words of sober truth and reason; I would show you how you can make yourself useful in the garden of the Lord, and so offer some thanksgiving for the bounties bestowed

on you. Pray consider it, Judith; I ask not for yea or nay at this moment; I would have your heart meditate over it in your own privacy, when you can bethink you of what has happened to you and what may happen to you in the future. Life has been glad for you so far; but trouble might come; your relatives are older than you; you might be left so that you would be thankful to have one beside you whose arm you could lean on in time of distress. Think over it, Judith; and may God incline your heart to what is right and best for you."

But at this moment the first of the early comers began to make their appearance—strolling along towards the churchyard, and chatting to each other as they came; and all at once it occurred to her that if he and she separated thus, he might consider that she had given some silent acquiescence to his reasons and arguments, and this possibility alarmed her.

"Good Master Blaise," said she, hurriedly, "pray mistake me not. Surely if you are choosing a help-mate for such high and holy reasons, it were well that you looked farther afield. I am all unworthy for such a place—indeed, I know it; there is not a maid in Stratford that would not better become it; nay, for my own part, I know several that I could point out to you, though your own judgment were best in such a matter. I pray you think no more of me in regard to such a position; God help me, I should make a parson's wife such as all the neighbours would stare at; indeed, I know there be many you could choose from—if their heart

were set in that direction — that are far better than I."

And with this protest she would fain have got away; and she was all anxiety to catch a glimpse of Prudence, whose appearance would afford her a fair excuse. How delightful would be the silence of the great building and the security of the oaken pew; with what a peace of mind would she regard the soft coloured beams of light streaming into the chancel; and listen to the solemn organ-music; and wait for the silver-clear tones of Susanna's voice. But good Master Walter would have another word with her ere allowing her to depart.

"In truth you misjudge yourself, Judith," said he, with a firm assurance, as if he could read her heart far better than she herself; "I know more of the duties pertaining to such a station than you; I can foresee that you would fulfil them worthily and in a manner pleasing to the Lord. Your parents, too: will you not consider their wishes before saying a final nay?"

"My parents?" she said, and she looked up with a quick surprise. "My mother, it may be——"

"And if your father were to approve also?"

For an instant her heart felt like lead; but before this sudden fright had had time to tell its tale in her eyes she had re-assured herself. This was not possible.

"Has my father expressed any such wish?" said she—but well she knew what the reply would be.

"No, he has not, Judith," he said, distinctly, "for

I have not spoken to him. But if I were to obtain his approval, would that influence you?"

She did not answer.

"I should not despair of gaining that," said he, with a calm confidence that caused her to lift her eyes and regard him for a second—with a kind of wonder, as it were, for she knew not what this assurance meant. "Your father," he continued, "must naturally desire to see your future made secure, Judith. Think what would happen to you all if an accident befell him on his journeyings to London. There would be no man to protect you and your mother. Dr. Hall has his own household and its charges; and two women left by themselves would surely feel the want of guidance and help. If I put these worldly considerations before you, it is with no wish that you should forget the higher duty you owe to God and His Church, and the care you should have of your own soul. Do I speak for myself alone? I think not. I trust it is not merely selfish hopes that have bidden me appeal to you. And you will reflect, Judith; you will commune with yourself, before saying the final yea or nay; and if your father should approve——"

"Good Master Blaise," said she, interrupting him—and she rose and glanced towards the straggling groups now approaching the church; "I cannot forbid you to speak to my father, if it is your wish to do that; but I would have him understand that it is through no desire of mine; and—and, in truth, he must know that I am all unfit to take the charge you would put upon me. I pray you hold it in

kindness that I say so:—and there, now,” she quickly added, “is little Willie Hart, that I have a message for, lest he escape me when we come out again.”

He could not further detain her; but he accompanied her as she walked along the path towards the little swinging gate; for she could see that her small cousin, though he had caught sight of her, was shyly uncertain as to whether he should come to her, and she wished to have his hand as far as the church-door. And then—alas! that such things should befall—at the very same moment a number of the young men and maidens also entered the churchyard; and foremost among them was Tom Quiney. One rapid glance that he directed towards her and the parson was all that passed; but instantly in her heart of hearts she knew the suspicion that he had formed. An assignation?—and on a Sunday morning, too! Nay, her guess was quickly confirmed. He did not stay to pay her even the ordinary courtesy of a greeting. He went on with the others; he was walking with two of the girls; his laughter and talk were louder than any. Indeed, this unseemly mirth was continued to within a yard or two of the church-door—perhaps it was meant for her to hear?

Little Willie Hart, as he and his cousin Judith went hand-in-hand through the porch, happened to look up at her.

“Judith,” said he, “why are you crying?”

“I am not!” she said, angrily. And with her hand she dashed aside those quick tears of vexation.

The boy did not pay close heed to what now went on within the hushed building. He was wondering over what had occurred—for these mysteries were beyond his years. But at least he knew that his cousin Judith was no longer angry with him; for she had taken him into the pew with her; and her arm, that was interlinked with his, was soft and warm and gentle to the touch; and once or twice, when the service bade them to stand up, she had put her hand kindly on his hair. And not only that, but she had at the outset taken from her bosom the little nosegay of mint, and given it to him; and the perfume of it (for it was Judith's gift, and she had worn it near her heart, and she had given it him with a velvet touch of her fingers) seemed to him a strange and sweet and mystical thing—something almost as strange and sweet and inexplicable as the beauty and shining tenderness of her eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

DIVIDED WAYS.

SOME few weeks passed quite uneventfully, bringing them to the end of June; and then it was that Mistress Hathaway chanced to send a message into the town that she would have her granddaughter Judith come over to see her roses, of which there was a great show in the garden. Judith was nothing loth; she felt she had somewhat neglected the old dame of late; and so, one morning—or rather one mid-day it was, for the family had but finished dinner—found her in her own room, before her mirror, busy with an out-of-door toilet, with Prudence sitting patiently by. Judith seemed well content with herself and with affairs in general on this warm summer day; now she spoke to Prudence, again she idly sang a scrap of some familiar song, while the work of adornment went on apace.

“But why such bravery, Judith?” her friend said, with a quiet smile. “Why should you take such heed about a walk through the fields to Shottery?”

“Truly I know not,” said Judith, carelessly; “but well I wot my grandmother will grumble. If I am soberly dressed she says I am a sloven, and will never win me a husband; and if I am pranked out,

she says I am vain and will frighten away the young men with my pride. In Heaven's name let them go, say I; I can do excellent well without them. What think you of the cap, good Prue?—'twas but last night I finished it; and the beads I had from Warwick."

She took it up, and regarded it, humming the while—

"O say, my Joan, say, my Joan, will not that do?
I cannot come every day to woo."

"Is't not a pretty cap, good gossip?"

Prudence knew that she ought to despise such frivolities; which truly were a snare to her, for she liked to look at Judith when she was dressed, as she was now, and she forgot to condemn these pretty colours. On this occasion Judith was clad in a gown of light gray or rather buff; with a petticoat of pale blue taffeta, elaborately quilted with her own handiwork; the small ruff she wore, which was open in front, and partly showed her neck, was snow-white and stiffly starched; and she was now engaged in putting on her soft brown hair this cap of gray velvet, adorned with two rows of brass beads, and with a bit of curling feather at the side of it. Prudence's eyes were pleased, if her conscience bade her disapprove; nay, sometimes she had to confess that at heart she was proud to see her dear gossip wear such pretty things, for that she became them so well.

"Judith," said she, "shall I tell you what I heard your father say of you last night? He was talking

to Julius; and they were speaking of this one and that, and how they did; and when you were mentioned, 'Oh yes,' says your father, 'the wench looks bravely well; 'tis a pity she cannot sell the painting of her cheeks: there be many a dame at the Court would buy it of her for a goodly sum.' "

Judith gave a quick short laugh; this was music in her ears—coming from whence it did.

"But, Judith," said her friend, with a grave inquiry in her face, "what is't that you have done to Tom Quiney, that he comes no longer near the house—nay, he will avoid you when he happens to see you abroad, for that I have observed myself, and more than once? What is the matter? How have you offended him?"

"What have I done?" she said; and there was a swift and angry colour in her face. "Let him ask what his own evil imaginings have done! Not that I care, in good sooth!"

"But what is it, Judith? There must be a reason."

"Why," said Judith, turning indignantly to her, "you remember, sweetheart, the Sunday morning that Mrs. Pike's little boy was taken ill, and you were sent for, and did not come to church?—well, I had gone along to the churchyard to seek you, and was waiting for you, when who must needs make his appearance but the worthy Master Blaise—nay, but I told you, good Prue, the honour he would put upon me; and thank Heaven he hath not returned to it, nor spoken to my father yet, as far as I can learn. Then, when the good parson's ser-

mon was over—body o' me, he let me know right sharply I was no saint; though a saint I might become, no doubt, were I to take him for my master—as I say, the lecture he gave me was over, and we were walking to the church-door, when who should come by but Master Quiney and some of the others. Oh, well I know my gentleman! The instant he clapped eyes on me, he suspected there had been a planned meeting; I could see it well; and off he goes in high dudgeon, and not a word nor a look—before the others, mind you, before the others, good Prue; that was the slight he put upon me; marry, I care not!—whither he has gone there he may stay!”

She spoke rapidly and with warmth; despite the scorn that was in her voice it was clear that that public slight had touched her deeply.

“Nay, Judith,” said her gentle companion, “’twere surely a world of pity you should let an old friend go away like that—through a mischance merely——”

“An old friend?” said she. “I want none of such friends, that have ill thoughts of you ere you can speak! Let him choose his friends elsewhere, say I; let him keep to his tapsters and his ale-house wenches—there he will have enough of pleasure, I doubt not, till his head be broke in a brawl some night!”

Then something seemed to occur to her. All at once she threw aside the bit of ribbon she had in her fingers, and dropped on her knee before her friend, and seized hold of Prudence’s hands.

“I beseech your pardon, dearest heart!—indeed,

indeed, I knew not what I said—they were but idle words—dear Prue, I pray you heed them not! He may have reasons for distrusting me; and in truth I complain not; 'tis a small matter; but I would not have you think ill of him through these idle words of mine! Nay, nay, they tell me he is sober and diligent; that his business prospers; that he makes many friends, and that the young men regard him as the chief of them all, whether it be at merriment or aught else."

"I am right glad to hear you speak so of the young man, Judith," Prudence said, in her gentle way, and yet mildly wondering at this sudden change of tone. "If he has displeased you, be sure he will be sorry for it, when he knows the truth."

"Nay, nay, sweet mouse," Judith said, rising, and resuming her careless manner, as she picked up the ribbon she had thrown aside. "'Tis of no moment. I wish the young man well, I pray you speak to none of that I have told you; perchance 'twas but an accident, and he meant no slight at all; and then—and then," she added, with a kind of laugh, "as the good parson seems determined that willy-nilly I must wed him and help him in his charge of souls, that were a good ending, sweet cousin?"

She was now all equipped for setting forth, even to the feather fan that hung from her girdle by a small silver cord.

"But I know he hath not spoken to my father yet, else I should have heard of it, in jest or otherwise. Come, mouse, shall we go; or the good dame will have a scolding for us."

Indeed this chance reference to the slight put upon her in the churchyard seemed to have left no sting behind it. She was laughing as she went down the stair at some odd saying of Bess Hall's that her father had got hold of. When they went outside she linked her arm within that of her friend, and nodded to this or the other passer-by, and had a merry or a pleasant word for them, accordingly as they greeted her. And

"Green-sleeves was all my joy,
Green-sleeves was my delight"

came naturally into her idle brain, for the day seemed a fit one for holiday-making; the skies were clear, with large white clouds moving slowly across the blue; and there was a fair west wind to stir the leaves of the trees and the bushes, and to touch warmly and softly her pink-hued cheek and pearly neck.

"Ah, me," said she, in mock desolation, "why should one go nowadays to Shottery? What use is in't, sweet Prue, when all the magic and enticement is gone from it? Aforetime I had the chance of meeting with so gracious a young gentleman, that brought news of the King's court, and spoke so soft you would think the cuckoo in the woods was still to listen. That were something to expect when one had walked so far—the apparition—a trembling interview—and then so civil and sweet a farewell! But now he is gone away I know not whither; and he has forgotten that ever he lodged in a farmhouse, like a king consorting with shepherds; and doubtless he will not seek to return. Well——"

"You have never heard of him since, Judith?" her friend said, with a rapid look.

"Alas, no!" she said, in the same simulated vein. "And sometimes I ask myself whether there ever was such a youth—whether the world ever did produce such a courtly gentleman, such a paragon, such a marvel of courtesy—or was it not but a trick of the villain wizard? Think of it, good Prue—to have been walking and talking with a ghost, with a thing of air—and that twice, too: is't not enough to chill the marrow in your bones? Well, I would that all ghosts were as gentle and mannerly—there would be less fear of them among the Warwickshire wenches. But do you know, good Prue," she said, suddenly altering her tone into something of eagerness, "there is a matter of more moment than ghosts that concerns us now? By this time, or I am mistaken quite, there must be a goodly bulk of the new play lying in the oaken chest; and again and again have I tried to see whether I might dare to carry away some of the sheets; but always there was some one to hinder. My father, you know, has been much in the summer-house, since the business of the new twenty acres was settled; and then again, when by chance he has gone away with the bailiff somewhere, and I have had my eye on the place, there was goodman Matthew on the watch, or else a maid would come by to gather a dish of green gooseberries for the baking, or Susan would have me seek out a ripe raspberry or two for the child, or my mother would call to me from the brewhouse. But 'tis there, Prue, be sure; and there will come a

chance, I warrant; I will outwit the ancient Matthew——”

“Do you never bethink you, Judith, what your father would say were he to discover?” her friend said, glancing at her, as they walked along the highway.

Judith laughed, but with some heightened colour.

“My father?” said she. “Truly, if he alone were to discover, I should have easy penance. Were it between himself and me, methinks there were no great harm done; a daughter may fairly seek to know the means that has gained for her father the commendation of so many of the great people, and placed him in such good estate in his own town. Marry, I fear not my father’s knowing, were I to confess to himself; but as for the others—were they to learn of it—my mother, and Susan, and Dr. Hall, and the pious Master Walter—I trow there might be some stormy weather abroad! At all events, good Prue, in any such mischance, you shall not suffer; ’tis I that will bear the blame, and all the blame; for indeed I forced you to it, sweet mouse; and you are as innocent of the wickedness as though you had ne’er been born.”

And now they were just about to leave the main road for the footpath leading to Shottery when they heard the sound of some one coming along on horseback; and, turning for a second, they found it was young Tom Quiney, who was on a smart Gallo-way nag, and coming at a goodly pace. As he passed them, he took off his cap and lowered it with formal courtesy.

"Give ye good day!" said he; but he scarcely looked at them; nor did he pull up for further talk or greeting.

"We are in such haste to be rich nowadays," said Judith, with a touch of scorn in her voice, as the two maidens set forth to walk through the meadows, "that we have scarce time to be civil to our friends!"

But she bore away no ill-will; the day was too fine for that. The soft west wind was tempering the heat and stirring the leaves of the elms; red and white wild roses were sprinkled among the dark green of the hedges; there was a perfume of elder-blossom in the air; and perhaps, also, a faint scent of hay, for in the distance they could see the mowers at work among the clover, and could see the long sweep of the scythe. The sun lay warm on the grass and the wild-flowers around them; there was a perfect silence but for the singing of the birds; and now and again they could see one of the mowers cease from his work, and a soft clicking sound told them that he was sharpening the long curving blade. They did not walk quickly: it was an idle day.

Presently some one came up behind them and overtook them; it was young Master Quiney, who seemed to have changed his mind, and was now on foot.

"You are going over to Shottery, Prudence?" said he.

Prudence flushed uneasily: why should he address her, and have no word for Judith?

"Yes," said she, "Mistress Hathaway would have us see her roses; she is right proud of them this year."

"'Tis a good year for roses," said he, in a matter-of-fact way, and as if there were no restraint at all on any of the party.

And then it seemed to occur to him that he ought to account for his presence.

"I guessed you were going to Shottery," said he, indifferently, and still addressing himself exclusively to Prudence; "and I got a lad to take on the nag and meet me at the cross-road; the short cut through the meadows is pleasant walking. To Mistress Hathaway's, said you? I dare promise you will be pleased with the show; there never was such a year for roses; and not a touch of blight anywhere, as I have heard. And a fine season for the crops, too; just such weather as the farmers might pray for; look at that field of rye over there, now—is't not a goodly sight?"

He was talking with much appearance of self-possession; it was Prudence who was embarrassed. As for Judith, she paid no heed; she was looking before her at the hedges and the elms, at the wild flowers around, and at the field of bearded rye, that bent in rustling gray-green undulations before the westerly breeze.

"And how does your brother, Prudence?" he continued. "'Tis well for him his business goes on from year to year without respect of the season; he can sleep o' nights without thinking of the weather. It is the common report that the others of the Town

Council hold him in great regard, and will have him become alderman ere long; is it not so?"

"I have heard some talk of it," Prudence said, with her eyes cast down.

At this moment they happened to be passing some patches of the common mallow, that were growing by the side of the path; and the tall and handsome youth who was walking with the two girls (but who never once let his eyes stray in the direction of Judith) stooped down and pulled one of the brightest clusters of the pale lilac blossoms.

"You have no flower in your dress, Prudence," said he, offering them to her.

"Nay, I care not to wear them," said she; and she would rather have declined them; but as he still offered them to her, how could she help accepting them and carrying them in her hand? And then, in desperation, she turned and addressed the perfectly silent and impassive Judith.

"Judith," said she, "you might have brought the mastiff with you for a run."

"Truly I might, sweetheart," said Judith, cheerfully, "but that my grandmother likes him not in the garden; his ways are over rough."

"Now that reminds me," said he, quickly (but always addressing Prudence), "of the little spaniel-gentle that I have. Do you know the dog, Prudence? 'Tis accounted a great beauty; and of the true Maltese breed. Will you accept him from me? In truth I will hold it a favour if you will take the little creature."

"I?" said Prudence, with much amazement; for

she had somehow vaguely heard that the dog had been purchased and brought to Stratford for the very purpose of being presented to Judith.

"I assure you 'tis just such an one as would make a pleasant companion for you," said he; "a gentle creature as ever was, and affectionate too—a most pleasant and frolicsome playfellow. Will you take it, Prudence?—for what can I do with the little beast?—I have no one to look after it."

"I had thought you meant Judith to have the spaniel!" said she, simply.

"Nay, how would that do, sweetheart?" said Judith, calmly. "Do you think the Don would brook such invasion of his domain? Would you have the little thing killed? You should take it, good cousin; 'twill be company for you should you be alone in the house."

She had spoken quite as if she had been engaged in the conversation all the way through; there was no appearance of anger or resentment at his ostentatious ignoring of her presence; whatever she felt she was too proud to show.

"Then you will take the dog, Prudence," said he. "I know I could not give it into gentler hands, for you could not but show it kindness, as you show to all."

"Give ye good thanks," said Prudence, with her pale face flushing with renewed embarrassment, "for the offer of the gift; but in truth I doubt if it be right and seemly to waste such care on a dumb animal when there be so many of our fellow-creatures that have more pressing claims on us. And

there are enough of temptations to idleness without our wilfully adding to them. But I thank you for the intention of your kindness—indeed I do.”

“Nay, now, you shall have it, good Prudence, whether you will or no,” said he, with a laugh. “You shall bear with the little dog but for a week, that I beg of you; and then if it please you not—if you find no amusement in its tricks and antics—I will take it back again. ’Tis a bargain; but as to your sending of it back, I have no fears; I warrant you ’twill overcome your scruples, for ’tis a most cunning and crafty playfellow, and merry withal; nor will it hinder you from being as kind and helpful to those around you as you have ever been. I envy the dog that is to have so gentle a guardian.”

They were now come to a parting of the ways; and he said he would turn off to the left, so as to reach the lane at the end of which his nag was awaiting him.

“And with your leave, Prudence,” said he, “I will bring the little spaniel to your house this evening—for I am only going now as far as Bidford; and if your brother be at home he may have half an hour to spare, that we may have a chat about the Corporation, and the new ordinances they propose to make. And so fare-you-well, and good wishes go with you!”

And with that he departed, and was soon out of sight.

“Oh, Judith,” Prudence exclaimed, almost melting into tears, “my heart is heavy to see it!”

“What, then, good cousin?” said Judith, lightly.

"The quarrel——"

"The quarrel, dear heart! Think of no such thing. In sober truth, dear Prudence, I would not have matters other than they are; I would not; I am well content; and as for Master Quiney, is not he improved? Did ever mortal hear him speak so fair before? Marry, he hath been learning good manners, and profited well! But there it is: you are so gentle, sweetheart, that every one, no matter who, must find you good company; while I am fractious, and ill to bear with; and do I marvel to see any one prefer your smooth ways and even disposition? And when he comes to-night, heed you, you must thank him right civilly for bringing you the little spaniel; 'tis a great favour; the dog is one of value that many would prize——"

"I cannot take it—I will not have it! 'Twas meant for you, Judith, as well you know," the other cried, in real distress.

"But you must and shall accept the gift!" her friend said, with decision. "Ay, and show yourself grateful for his having singled you out withal. Neither himself nor his spaniel would go long a-begging in Stratford, I warrant you: give him friendly welcome, sweetheart."

"He went away without a word to you, Judith!"

"I am content."

"But why should it be thus?" Prudence said, almost piteously.

"Why? Dear mouse, I have told you! He and I never did agree; 'twas ever something wrong on one side or the other; and wherefore should not he

look around for a gentler companion? 'Twere a wonder should he do aught else; and now he hath shown more wisdom than ever I laid to his credit."

"But the ungraciousness of his going, Judith——" said the gentle Prudence, who could in no wise understand the apparent coolness with which Judith seemed to regard the desperate thing that had taken place.

"Heaven have mercy, why should that trouble you, if it harm not me?" was the instant answer. "My spirits are not like to be dashed down for want of a 'fare-you-well'; in good sooth he had given you so much of his courtesy and fair speeches that perchance he had none to spare for others!"

By this time they were come to the little wooden gate leading into the garden; and it was no wonder they should pause in passing through that to regard the bewildering and glowing luxuriance of foliage and blossom, though this was but a cottage enclosure, and none of the largest. The air seemed filled with the perfume of this summer abundance; and the clear sunlight shone on the various masses of colour—roses red and white, pansies, snapdragon, none-so-pretty, sweet-williams of every kind, to say nothing of the clustering honeysuckle that surrounded the cottage door.

"Was't not worth the trouble, sweetheart?" Judith said. "Indeed the good dame does well to be proud of such a pageant."

As she spoke her grandmother suddenly made her appearance, glancing sharply from one to the other of them.

"Welcome, child, welcome," she said, "and to you, sweet Mistress Shawe."

And yet she did not ask them to enter the cottage; there was some kind of hesitation about the old dame's manner that was unusual.

"Well, grandmother," said Judith gaily, "have you no grumbling? My cap I made myself; then must it be out of the fashion. Or I did not make it myself; then must it have cost a mint of money. Or what say you to my petticoat—does not the colour offend you? Shall I ever attain to the pleasing of you, think you, good grandmother?"

"Wench, wench, hold your peace!" the old dame said in a lower voice. "There be one within that may not like the noise of strangers—though he be no stranger to you, as he saith——"

"What, grandmother?" Judith exclaimed, and involuntarily she shrank back a little, so startled was she. "A stranger?—in the cottage? You do not mean the young gentleman that is in hiding—that I met in the lane——"

"The same, Judith, the same," she said quickly; "and I know not whether he would wish to be seen by more than needs be——"

She glanced at Judith, who understood: moreover, the latter had pulled together her courage again.

"Have no fear, good grandmother," said she; and she turned to Prudence: "You hear, good Prue, who is within——"

"Yes," the other answered, but she was somewhat breathless.

"Now, then, is such an opportunity as may ne'er occur again," Judith said. "You will come with me, good Prue? Nay, but you must!"

"Indeed I shall not!" Prudence exclaimed, stepping back in affright. "Not for worlds, Judith, would I have aught to do with such a thing! And you, Judith, for my sake, come away! We will go back to Stratford!—we will look at the garden some other time!—in truth I can see your grandmother is of my mind too. Judith, for the love of me, come!—let us get away from this place!"

Judith regarded her with a strange kind of smile.

"I have had such courtesy and fair manners shown me to-day, dear heart," said she, with a sort of gracious calmness, "that I am fain to seek elsewhere for some other treatment, lest I should grow vain. Will it please you wait for me in the garden, then? Grandmother, I am going in with you to help you give your guest good welcome."

"Judith!" the terrified Prudence exclaimed, in a kind of despair.

But Judith, with her head erect, and with a perfect and proud self-possession, had followed her grandmother into the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HERALD MERCURY.

THE distance between this luxuriant garden, all radiant and glowing in light and colour, and the small and darkened inner room of the cottage, was but a matter of a few yards; yet in that brief space, so alert was her brain, she had time to consider much. And with her pride or anger was always of short duration—the sunny cheerfulness of her nature refusing to harbour such uncongenial guests. Why, she asked herself, should she take umbrage at the somewhat too open neglect that had just been shown her? Was it not tending in the very direction she had herself desired? Had she not begged and prayed Quiney to give Prudence the little spaniel-gentle? Nay, had she not wilfully gone and buried in the churchyard the bit of rosemary that he had sent her to keep—putting it away from her with the chance of its summoning an unknown lover? So now, she said to herself, she would presently come out again to the poor affrighted Prudence, and would reassure her, and congratulate her, moreover, with words of good cheer and comfort for the future.

And then again, in this lightning-like survey of the situation, she was conscious that she was be-

comingly dressed—and right glad, indeed, that she had chanced to put on the gray velvet cap with the brass beads and the curling feather; and she knew that the stranger gentleman would be courteous and civil, with admiring eyes. Moreover, she had a vague impression that he was somewhat too much given to speak of Ben Jonson; and she hoped for some opportunity to let him understand that her father was one of good estate, and much thought of by every one around, whose daughter knew what was due to his position, and could conduct herself not at all as a country wench. And so it was that the next minute found her in the twilight of the room; and there, truly enough, he was, standing at the small window.

“Give ye good welcome, sir,” said she.

“What! fair Mistress Judith?” he said, as he quickly turned round. And he would have come forward and kissed her hand, perchance, but that a moment’s hesitation prevented him.

“It may be that I have offended you,” said he, diffidently.

“In what, good sir?”

She was quite at her ease; the little touch of modest colour in her face could scarcely be attributed to rustic shyness; it was but natural, and it added to the gentleness of her look.

“Nay, then, sweet lady, ’twas but a lack of courage, that I would ask you to pardon,” said he—though he did not seem conscious of heavy guilt, to judge by the way in which his black and eloquent eyes regarded Judith’s face and the prettinesses of

her costume. "There was a promise that I should communicate with you if I returned to this part of the country, but I found myself not bold enough to take advantage of your kindness. However, fortune has been my friend, since again I meet you; 'tis the luckiest chance; I but asked your good grandmother here for a cup of water as I passed, and she would have me take a cup of milk instead; and then she bade me to come in out of the heat for a space—which I was nothing loth to do, as you may guess; and here have I been taking up the good lady's time with I know not what of idle gossip——"

"But sit ye down, grandchild," the good dame said; "and you, sir, pray sit you down. Here, wench"—she called to the little maid that was her sole domestic. "Go fill this jug from the best barrel."

And then she herself proceeded to get down from the high wooden rail some of the pewter trenchers that shone there like a row of white moons in the dusk; and these she placed on the table with one or two knives; and then she began to get forth cakes, a cheese, a ham, some spiced bread, the half of a cold gooseberry-tart, and what not.

"'Tis not every day we come by a visitor in these quiet parts," said she; "ay, good sir, and one that is not afraid to speak out his mind. Nay, nay, grandchild, I tell thee sit thee down; thou art too fine a madam this morning to meddle wi' kitchen matters. Tell the gentleman I be rather deaf; but I thank him for his good company. Sit ye down, sweeting; sooth, you look bravely this morning."

"Have I pleased you at last, grandmother? 'tis a miracle, surely!" she said, with a smile; and then she turned gravely to entertain the old dame's visitor. "I hope your fortunes have mended sir," said she.

"In a measure—somewhat—but still I am forced to take heed——"

"Perchance you have still the letter to my father?" she asked.

"Nay, madam, I considered it a prudent thing to destroy it—little as that was in my heart."

"I had thought on your next coming to the neighbourhood that you would have taken the chance to make my father's friendship," said she; and not without some secret disappointment; for she was anxious that this acquaintance of Ben Jonson's should see the New Place, with all its tapestries and carved wood and silver-gilt bowls; with its large fair garden, too, and substantial barns and stables. Perhaps she would have had him carry the tale to London? There were some things (she considered) quite as fine as the trumpery masques and mummeries of the Court that the London people seemed to talk about. She would have liked him to see her father at the head of his own table, with her mother's napery shining, and plenty of good friends round the board, and her father drinking to the health of Bess Hall out of the silver-topped tankard that Thomas Combe, and Russell, and Julius Shawe, and the rest of them, had given him on his last birthday. Or perchance she would have had him see her father riding through the town of Stratford with some of these good neighbours (and who the

handsomest of all the company? she would make bold to ask), with this one and that praising the Evesham roan, and the waggoners as they passed touching their caps to "worthy Mahster Shacksper." Ben Jonson! Well, she had seen Ben Jonson. There was not a maid in the town would have looked his way. Whereas, if there were any secret enchantments going forward on Hallowmas-eve (and she knew of such, if the ministers did not), and if the young damsels were called on to form a shape in their brain as they prayed for the handsome lover that was to be sent them in the future, she was well aware what type of man they would choose from amongst those familiar to them; and also, it had more than once reached her ears that the young fellows would jokingly say among themselves that right well it was that Master Shakespeare was married and in safe keeping, else they would never have a chance. In the meanwhile, and with much courtesy, this young gentleman was endeavouring to explain to her why it was he dared not go near Stratford town.

"Truly, sweet Mistress Judith," said he, in his suave voice, and with modestly downcast eyes, "it is a disappointment to me in more regards than one; perchance I dare not say how much. But in these times one has to see that one's own misfortunes may not prove harmful to one's friends; and then again, ever since the French King's murder, they are becoming harder and harder against any one, however innocent he may be, that is under suspicion. And whom do they not suspect? The

Parliament have entreated the King to be more careful of his safety; and the recusants—as they call those that have some regard for the faith they were brought up in—must not appear within ten miles of the Court. Nay, they are ordered to betake themselves to their own dwellings; and by the last proclamation all Roman priests, Jesuits, and seminaries, are banished the kingdom;—I wonder not your good grandmother should have a word of pity for them that are harried this way and that for conscience sake.”

“I say naught, I say naught; ’twere well to keep a still tongue,” the old dame said, being still busy with the table. “But I have heard there wur more peace and quiet in former days when there wur but one faith in the land; ay, and good tending of the poor folk by the monks and the rich houses.”

However, the chance reference to the French King had suddenly recalled to Judith that Prudence was waiting her in the garden, and her conscience smote her for her neglect; while she was determined that so favourable an opportunity should not be lost of banishing once and for ever her dear gossip’s cruel suspicions. So she rose.

“I crave your pardon, good sir,” said she, “if I leave you for a moment to seek my gossip Prudence Shawe that was to wait for me in the garden. I would have you acquainted with each other; but pray you, sir, forbear to say anything against the Puritan section of the church, for she is well inclined that way, and she has a heart that is easily wounded.”

“And thank you for the caution, fair Mistress

Judith," said he, and he rose, and bowed low; and stood hat in hand until she had left the apartment.

At first, so blinding was the glare of light and colour, she could hardly see; but presently, when her eyes were less dazzled, she looked everywhere, and found the garden quite empty. She called; there was no answer. She went down to the little gate; there was no one in the road. And so, taking it for granted that Prudence had sought safety in flight, and was now back in Stratford town, or on the way thither, she returned into the cottage with a light heart, and well content to hear what news was abroad.

"Pray you, sir," said old Mistress Hathaway, "sit in to the table; and you, grandchild, come your ways. If the fare be poor, the welcome is hearty. What, then, Judith? Dined already, say'st thou? Body o' me, a fresh-coloured young wench like you should be ready for your dinner at any time. Well, well, sit thee in, and grace the table; and you shall sip a cup of claret for the sake of good company."

Master Leofric Hope, on the other hand, was not at all backward in applying himself to this extemporised meal; on the contrary, he did it such justice as fairly warmed the old dame's heart. And he drank to her, moreover, bending low over his cup of ale; but he did not do the like by Judith—for some reason or another. And all the while he was telling them of the affairs of the town; as to how there was much talking of the new river that

was to bring water from some ten or twelve miles off, and how one Middleton was far advanced with the cutting of it, although many were against it, and would have the project overthrown altogether. Of these and similar matters he spoke right pleasantly, and the old dame was greatly interested; but Judith grew to think it strange that so much should be said about public affairs, and what the people were talking about, and yet no mention made of her father. And so it came about, when he went on to tell them of the new ship of war that so many were going to see at Woolwich, and that the King made so much of, she said—

“Oh, my father knows all about that ship. ’Twas but the other day I heard him and Master Combe speak of it; and of the King too; and my father said, ‘Poor man, ’tis a far smaller ship than that he will make his last voyage in.’”

“Said he that of the King?”

She looked up in quick alarm.

“But as he would have said it of me or of you or of any one,” she exclaimed. “Nay, my father is well inclined towards the King, though he be not as much at the Court as some, nor caring to make pageants for the Court ladies and their attendants and followers.”

If there were any sarcasm in this speech he did not perceive it, for it merely led him on to speak of the new masque that Ben Jonson was preparing for the Prince Henry; and incidentally he mentioned that the subject was to be Oberon the Fair Prince.

"Oberon?" said Judith, opening her eyes. "Why, my father hath writ about that!"

"Oh yes, as we all know," said he courteously; "but there will be a difference——"

"A difference?" said she. "By my life, yes! There will be a difference. I wonder that Master Jonson was not better advised."

"Nay, in this matter, good Mistress Judith," said he, "there will be no comparison. I know 'tis the fashion to compare them——"

"To compare my father and Master Jonson?" she said, as if she had not heard aright. "Why, what comparison? In what way? Pray you remember, sir, I have seen Master Ben Jonson. I have seen him, and spoken with him. And as for my father, I'll be bound there is not his fellow for a handsome presence and gracious manners in all Warwickshire—no, nor in London town neither, I'll be sworn!"

"I meant not that, sweet lady," said he, with a smile; and he added grimly: "I grant you our Ben looks as if he had been in the wars; he hath had a tussle with Bacchus on many a merry night, and bears the scars of these noble combats. No, 'tis the fashion to compare them as wits——"

"I'd as lief compare them as men, good sir," said she, with a touch of pride, "and I know right well which should have my choice."

"When it is my good fortune, dear lady," said the young man, "to have Master William Shakespeare's daughter sitting before me, I need no other testimony to his grace and bearing, even had I never

set eyes on him." And with that he bowed low; and there was a slight flush on her face that was none of displeasure, while the old dame said—

"Ay, ay, there be many a wench in Warwickshire worse-favoured than she; pray heaven it turn not her head; the wench is a good wench, but ill to manage; and 'twere no marvel if the young men got tired of waiting."

To escape from any further discussion of this subject Judith proposed that they should go out and look at her grandmother's roses and pansies, which was in truth the object of her visit; and she added that if Master Hope (this was the first time she had named him by his name) were still desirous of avoiding observation, they could go to the little bower at the upper hedgerow, which was sufficiently screened from the view of any passer-by. The old dame was right willing, for she was exceedingly proud of this garden that had no other tending than her own; and so she got her knitting-needles and ball of wool, and preceded them out into the warm air and the sunlight.

"Dear, dear me," said she, stopping to regard two small shrubs that stood withered and brown by the side of the path. "There be something strange in that rosemary now, in good sooth there be; try as I may, I cannot bring them along; the spring frost makes sure to kill them." And then she went on again.

"Strange, indeed," said the young man to his companion, these two being somewhat behind, "that

a plant that is so fickle and difficult to hold should be the emblem of constancy."

"I know not what they do elsewhere," said Judith, carelessly pulling a withered leaf or two to see if they were quite inodorous, "but hereabouts they often use a bit of rosemary for a charm and the summoning of spirits."

He started somewhat, and glanced at her quickly and curiously. But there was clearly no subtle intention in the speech. She idly threw away the leaves.

"Have you faith in such charms, Mistress Judith?" said he, still regarding her.

"In truth I know not," she answered, as if the question were of but little moment. "There be some who believe in them, and others that laugh. But strange stories are told; marry, there be some of them that are not pleasant to hear of a winter's night, when one has to change the warm chimney-corner for the cold room above. There is my grandmother, she hath a rare store of them; but they fit not well with the summer-time and with such a show as this."

"A goodly show indeed," said he; and by this time they were come to a small arbour of rude lattice-work mostly smothered in foliage; and there was a seat within it, and also a tiny table; while in front they were screened from the gaze of any one going along the road by a straggling and propped-up wall of peas that were now showing their large white blossoms plentifully among the green.

"'Tis a quiet spot," said he, when they were

seated, and the old dame had taken to her knitting; "'tis enough to make one pray never to hear more of the din and turmoil of London."

"I should have thought, sir," said Judith, "you would have feared to go near London, if there be those that would fain get to know of your whereabouts."

"Truly," said he, "I have no choice. I must run the risk. From time to time I must seek to see whether the cloud that is hanging over me gives signs of breaking. And surely such must now be the case, when fortune hath been so kind to me as to place me where I am at this moment—in such company—with such a quiet around. 'Tis like the work of a magician; though from time to time I remind me that I should rise and leave, craving your pardon for intruding on you withal."

"Trouble not yourself, young sir," the old dame said, in her matter-of-fact way, as she looked up from her knitting, "if the place content you, 'tis right well; we be in no such hurry in these country parts; we let the day go by as it lists, and thank God for a sound night's rest at the end of it."

"And you have a more peaceful and happy life than the London citizens, I'll be bound," said he, "with all their feasts and gaieties and the noise of drums and the like."

"We hear but the murmur of such things from a far distance," Judith said. "Was there not a great to-do on the river when the citizens gave their welcome to the Prince?"

"Why, there, now," said he, brightening up at

this chance of repaying in some measure the courtesy of his entertainers; "there was as wonderful a thing as London ever saw. A noble spectacle, truly; for the Companies would not be outdone; and such bravery of apparel, and such a banqueting in the afternoon! And perchance you heard of it but through some news-letter? Shall I tell you what I saw on my own part?"

"If it be not too troublesome to you, good sir."

He was glad enough; for he had noticed, when he was describing such things, that Judith's eyes grew absent, and he could gaze at them without fear of causing her to start and blush. Moreover, it was a pretty face to tell a story to; and the day was so still and shining; and all around them there was a scent of roses in the air.

"Why, it was about daybreak, as I should think," he said, "that the citizens began to come forth; and a bright fair morning it was; and all of them in their best array. And you may be sure that when the Companies learned that the whole of the citizens were minded to show their love for the Prince Henry on his coming back from Richmond, they were not like to be behind-hand; and such preparations had been made as you would scarce believe. Well, then, so active were they in their several ways that by eight of the clock the Companies were all assembled in their barges of state to wait the Lord Mayor and Aldermen; and such a sound of drums and trumpets and fifes was there; and the water covered with the fleet, and the banks all crowded with them that had come down to see. Then the

Lord Mayor and the Aldermen being arrived, the great procession set forth in state; and such a booming of cannon there was, and cheering from the crowd. 'Twas a sight, on my life; for they bore the pageant with them—that was a huge whale and a dolphin; and on the whale sate a fair and lovely nymph, Corinea she was called, the Queen of Cornwall; and she had a coronet of strange sea-shells, and strings of pearls around her neck and on her wrists; and her dress was of crimson silk, so that all could make her out from a distance; and she had a silver shield slung on to her left arm and in her right hand a silver spear—oh, a wonderful sight she was; I marvel not the crowd cheered and cheered again. Then on the other animal—that is the dolphin—sate one that represented Amphion—he was the father of music, as you must know; and a long beard he wore, and he also had a wreath of sea-shells on his head, and in his hand a harp of gold that shone in the sun. Well, away they set towards Chelsea; and there they waited for the Prince's approach——”

“And the young Prince himself,” Judith said, quickly and eagerly, “he bears himself well, does he not? He bears himself like a prince? He would match such a pageant right royally, is't not so?”

“Why, he is the very model and mirror of princehood!—the pink of chivalry!—nor is there one of them at the Court that can match him at the knightly exercises,” said this enthusiastic chronicler, who had his reward in seeing how interested she

was. "Well, when the young Prince was come to Chelsea, there he paused, and the Queen Corinea addressed him in a speech of welcome—truly, I could not hear a word of it, there being such a noise among the multitude, but I was told thereafter that it presented him with their love and loyal duty; and then they all set forth towards Whitehall again. By this time 'twas later in the day; and no man would have believed so many dwelt in the neighbourhood of our great river; and that again was as naught to the crowd assembled when they were come again to the town. And here—as it must have been arranged beforehand, doubtless—the fleet of barges separated, and formed two long lines, so as to make a lane for the Prince to pass through, with great cheering and shouting, so that when they were come to the Court steps he was at the head of them all. And now it was that the dolphin approached, and Amphion, that was riding on his back, bid the Prince a loyal farewell in the name of all the citizens; and at the end of the speech—which, in truth, the people guessed at rather than heard—there was such a tumult of huzzas, and a firing of cannon, and the drums and the trumpets sounding, and on every hand you could hear nothing but 'Long live our Prince of Wales, the Royal Henry!'"

"And he bore himself bravely, I'll dare be sworn!" she exclaimed. "I have heard my father speak of him—he is one that will uphold the honour of England when he comes to the throne!"

"And there was such a feasting and rejoicing

that evening," he continued, within-doors and without; and many an honest man, I fear me, transgressed, and laid the train for a sore distracted head next day. Then 'twas some two or three evenings after that, if I remember aright, that we had the great water-fight and the fireworks—but perchance you heard of these, sweet Mistress Judith?"

"In truth, good sir," she answered, "I heard of these as of the welcome you speak of, but in so scant a way as to be of no avail. 'Tis not a kind of talking that is encouraged at our house; unless, indeed, when Julius Shawe and Master Combe and some of them come in of an evening to chat with my father; and then sometimes I contrive to linger, with the bringing in of a flagon of Rhenish or the like—until I am chid and sent forth. I pray you, good sir, if I do not outwear your patience, to tell us of the water-fight, too."

"'Tis I that am more like to outwear your patience, fair Judith," said he. "I would I had a hundred fights to tell you of. But this one—well, 'twas a rare and goodly pageant; and a vast crowd was come down to the water's edge to see what was going forward, for most of the business of the day was over, and both master and prentice were free. And very soon we saw how the story was going; for there was a Turkish pirate, with fierce men with blackened faces; and they would plunder two English merchantmen and make slaves of the crews. This was but the beginning of the fight; and there was great firing of guns and manœuvring of the

vessels; and the merchantmen were like to fare badly, not being trained to arms like the pirate. In sooth they were sore bestead; but presently up came two ships of war to the rescue, and then the coil began in good earnest, I warrant you; for there was boarding and charging and clambering over the bulwarks—ay, and many an honest man on both sides knocked into the sea—until in the end they had killed or secured all the pirates, and then there was naught to do but to blow up the pirate ship into the air, with a noise like thunder, and scarce a rag or spar of him remaining. 'Twas a right good ending, I take it, in the minds of the worthy citizens; doubtless they hoped that every Turkish rogue would be served the like. And then it was that the blowing-up of the pirate ship was a kind of signal for the beginning of the fireworks; and it had grown to dusk now; so that the blazes of red light and blue light and the whizzing of the squibs and what not seemed to fill all the air. 'Twas a rare climax to the destruction of the Turkish thieves; and the people cheered and cheered again when 'twas well done; and then at the end came a great discharge of guns and squibs and showers of stars that one would have thought the whole world was set on fire. Sure I am that the waters of the Thames never saw such a sight before. And the people went home right well content; and I doubt not drank to the confusion of all pirates, as well as to the health of the young Prince, that is to preserve the realm to us in years to come."

They talked for some time thereafter about that

and other matters, and about his own condition and occupation at the farm; and then he rose, and there was a smile on his face.

"You know, fair Mistress Judith," said he, "that a wise man is careful not to outstay his welcome, lest it be not offered to him again; and your good grandmother has afforded me so pleasant an hour's gossip and good company that I would fain look forward to some other chance of the same in the future."

"Must you go, good sir?" said Judith, also rising. "I trust we have not overtaxed your patience. We country folk are hungry listeners."

"To have been awarded so much of your time, sweet Mistress Judith," said he, bowing very low, "is an honour I am not likely to forget."

And then he addressed the old dame, who had missed something of this.

"Give ye good thanks for your kindness, good Mistress Hathaway," said he.

"Good fortune attend ye, sir," said the old dame contentedly, and without ceasing from her knitting.

Judith was standing there, with her eyes cast down.

"Sweet lady, by your leave," said he, and he took her hand and raised it and just touched her fingers with his lips. Then he bowed low again and withdrew.

"Fare you well, good sir," Judith had said at the same moment, but without any word as to a future meeting. Then she returned into the little arbour and sate down.

"Is't not like a meteor, grandmother, shooting across the sky?" said she, merrily. "Beshrew me, but the day has grown dark since he left! Didst ever hear of such a gallymawfrey of dolphins and whales, and prince's barges, and the roaring of cannon, and fireworks? Sure 'tis well we live in the country quiet—our ears would be riven in twain else. And you, grandmother, that was ever preaching about prudent behaviour, to be harbouring one that may be an outlaw—a recusant—perchance he hath drawn his sword in the King's presence——"

"What know you of the young gentleman, Judith?" the old dame said, sharply.

"Marry, not a jot beyond what he hath doubtless told to yourself, good grandmother. But see you any harm in him? Have you suspicion of him? Would you have me think—as Prudence would fain believe—that there be witchcraft about him?"

"Truly I see no harm in the young gentleman," the old grandmother was constrained to say. "And he be fair spoken, and modest withal. But look you to this, wench: should you chance to meet him again while he bideth here in this neighbourhood—I trow 'twere better you did not—but should that chance, see you keep a still tongue in your head about church and King and Parliament. Let others meddle who choose: 'tis none of your affairs; do you hear me, child? These be parlous times, as the talk is; they do well that keep the byways, and let my lord's coaches go whither they list."

"Grandmother," said Judith, gravely, "I know there be many things in which I cannot please you,

but this sin that you would lay to my charge—nay, dear grandam, when have you caught me talking about church and King and Parliament? Truly I wish them well; but I am content if they go their own way.”

The old dame glanced at her to see what this demure tone of speech meant.

“Thou?” she said, in a sort of grumble. “Thy brain be filled with other gear, I reckon. ’Tis a bit of ribbon that hath hold of thee; or the report as to which of the lads shot best at the match; or perchance ’tis the purchase of some penny ballads, that you may put the pictures on your chamber-wall, as if you were a farm-wench just come in from the milking-pail.”

“Heaven have pity on me, good grandmother,” said she, with much penitence, and she looked down at her costume, “but I can find no way of pleasing you. You scold me for being but a farm-wench; and truly this petticoat, though it be pretty enough, methinks might have been made of a costlier stuff; and my cap—good grandmother, look at my cap——”

She took it off, and smoothed the gray velvet of it, and arranged the beads and the feather.

“Is the cap also too much of the fashion of a farm-wench? or have I gone amiss the other way, and become too like a city dame? Would that I knew how to please you, grandam!”

“Go thy ways, child, get thee home!” the old woman said, but only half-angrily. “Thy foolish head hath been turned by hearing of those Court

gambols. Get you to your needle; be your mother's napery all so well mended that you can spend the whole day in idleness?"

"Nay, but you are in the right there, good grandmother," said Judith, drawing closer to her, and taking her thin and wrinkled hand in her own warm, white soft ones. "But not to the needle—not to the needle, good grandam; I have other eggs on the spit. Did not I tell you of the Portugal receipts that Prudence got for me—in good sooth I did; well, the dishes were made; and next day at dinner my father was right well pleased. 'Tis little heed he pays to such matters, and we scarce thought of asking him how he liked the fare, when all at once he said: 'Good mother, you must give my thanks to Jane cook; 'twill cheer her in her work; nay, I owe them.' Then says my mother: 'But these two dishes were not prepared by the cook, good husband; 'twas one of the maids.' 'One of the maids?' he says. 'Well, which one of the maids?—truly, 'tis something rare to be found in a country house.' And then there was a laughing amongst all of them; and he fixes his eyes on me. 'What?' he says, 'that saucy wench? Is she striving to win her a husband at last?' And so you see, good grandmother, I must waste no more time here; for Prudence hath one or two more of these receipts, and I must try them to see whether my father approves or not."

And so she kissed the old dame, and bade her farewell, refusing at the same time to have the escort of the small maid across the meadows to the town.

All the temporary annoyance of the morning was now over and forgotten; she was wholly pleased to have had this interview, and to have heard minutely of all the great doings in London. She walked quickly; a careless gladness shone in her face; and she was lightly singing to herself—as she went along the well-beaten path through the fields—

“Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever.”

But it was not in the nature of any complaint against the inconstancy of man that this rhyme had come into her head. Quite other thoughts came as well. At one moment she was saying to herself:

“Why, now, have I no spaniel-gentle with me to keep me company?”

And then the next minute she was saying, with a sort of laugh:

“God help me, I fear I am none of the spaniel-gentle kind!”

But there was no deep smiting of conscience even when she confessed so much. Her face was radiant and content; she looked at the cattle—or the trees, or the children, as it chanced—as if she knew them all, and knew that they were friendly towards her; and then again the idle air would come into her brain—

“Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny;
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into hey, nonny, nonny!”

CHAPTER XIV.

A TIREWOMAN.

It was not until after supper that evening that Judith was free to seek out her companion who had fled from her in the morning; and when she did steal forth—carrying a small basket in her hand—she approached the house with much more caution than was habitual with her. She glanced in at the lower windows, but could see nothing. Then, instead of trying whether the latch was left loose, she formally knocked at the door.

It was opened by a little rosy-cheeked girl of eleven or twelve, who instantly bobbed a respectful curtsy.

“Is Mistress Prudence within, little Margery?” she said.

“Yes, if it please you,” said the little wench, and she stood aside to let Judith pass.

But Judith did not enter; she seemed listening.

“Where is she?”

“In her own chamber, if it please you.”

“Alone, then?”

“Yes, if it please you, Mistress Judith.”

Judith patted the little maid in requital of her courtesy, and then stole noiselessly upstairs. The door was open. Prudence was standing before a

small table ironing a pair of snow-white cuffs; the while she was repeating to herself verses of a psalm. Her voice, low as it was, could be heard distinctly:

“Open thou my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

For thou desirest no sacrifice, though I would give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering.

The sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit; a contrite and a broken heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Be favourable unto Zion for thy good pleasure; build the walls of Jerusalem.

Then shalt thou accept the sacrifices of righteousness, even the burnt-offering and oblation; then shall they offer calves upon thine altar.”

She happened to turn her head; and then she uttered a slight cry of surprise, and came quickly to Judith, and caught her by the hand.

“What said he?” she exclaimed, almost breathlessly. “You saw him? ’Twas the same, was it not? How came he there? Judith, tell me!”

“You timid mouse that ran away!” the other said, with a complacent smile. “Why, what should he say? But prithee go on with the cuffs, else the iron will be cold. And are you alone in the house, Prudence? There is no one below?”

“None but the maids, I trow; or Julius, perchance, if he be come in from the malt-house.”

“Quick, then, with the cuffs,” Judith said, “and get them finished. Nay, I will tell thee all about the young gentleman thereafter. Get thee finished with the cuffs, and put them on——”

“But I meant them not for this evening, Judith,” said she, with her eyes turned away.

"'Tis this evening, and now, you must wear them," her friend said peremptorily. "And more than these. See I have brought you some things, dear gossip, that you must wear for my sake—nay, nay, I will take no denial—you must and shall—and with haste, too, must you put them on, lest any one should come and find the mistress of the house out of call. Is not this pretty, good Prudence?"

She had opened the basket and taken therefrom a plaited ruff that the briefest feminine glance showed to be of the finest cobweb-lawn, tinged a faint saffron hue, and tied with silken strings. Prudence, who now divined the object of her visit, was overwhelmed with confusion. The fair and pensive face became rose-red with embarrassment; and she did not even know how to protest.

"And this," said Judith, in the most matter-of-fact way, taking something else out of the basket, "will also become you well—nay, not so, good mouse, you shall be as prim and Puritanical as you please to-morrow; to-night you shall be a little braver; and is it not handsome, too?—'twas a gift to my mother—and she knows that I have it—though I have never worn it."

This second article that she held out and stroked with her fingers was a girdle of buff-coloured leather, embroidered with flowers in silk of different colours, and having a margin of filigree silverwork both above and below, and a broad silver clasp.

"Come, then, let's try——"

"Nay, Judith," the other said, retreating a step, "I cannot—indeed, I cannot——"

"Indeed, you must, silly child!" Judith said, and she caught hold of her angrily. "I say you shall. What know you of such things? Must I teach you manners?"

And when Judith was in this authoritative mood Prudence had but little power to withstand her. Her face was still burning with embarrassment; but she succumbed in silence; while Judith whipped off the plain linen collar that her friend wore, and set on in its stead this small but handsome ruff. She arranged it carefully, and smoothed Prudence's soft fair hair, and gave a finishing touch to the three-cornered cap: then she stepped back a pace or two to contemplate her handiwork.

"There!" she exclaimed (pretending to see nothing of Prudence's blushes). "A princess! On my life, a princess! And now for the girdle—but you must cast aside that housewife's pouch, sweetheart, and I will lend thee this little pomander of mine; in truth 'twill suit it well——"

"No, no, dear Judith!" the other said, almost piteously, "indeed I cannot prank me out in these borrowed plumes. If you will have it so, I will wear the ruff; but not the girdle—not the girdle, dear cousin—that all would see was none of mine——"

"What's that?" Judith exclaimed suddenly, for there was a noise below.

"'Tis Julius come in from the barn," Prudence said.

"Mercy on us," the other cried, with a laugh, "I thought 'twas the spaniel-gentle come already. So you will not wear the girdle? Well, the ruff be-

comes you right fairly: and—and those roses in your cheeks, good Prue—why, what is the matter? Is there aught wonderful in one of Julius's friends coming to see him in the evening? And as the mistress of the house you must receive him well and courteously; and be not so demure of speech, and distant in manner, dearest heart, for youth must have a little merriment, and we cannot always be at our prayers."

"I know not what you mean, Judith, unless it be something that is far away from any thought or wish of mine."

There was a touch of sincerity in this speech that instantly recalled Judith from her half-jibing ways. The truth was, that while she herself was free enough in confiding to this chosen gossip of hers all about such lovers or would-be lovers as happened to present themselves, Prudence had never volunteered any similar confidence in return; and the very fact that there might be reasons for this reticence was enough to keep Judith from seeking to remove the veil. Judith herself was accustomed to make merry over the whole matter of sweethearts and rhymed messages and little tender gifts; but Prudence was sensitive, and Judith was careful not to wound her by indiscreet questioning. And at this moment, when Prudence was standing there confused and abashed, some compunction seized the heart of her friend. She took her hand.

"In good sooth, I meant not to tease you, sweetheart," said she, in a kindly way; "and if I advise you in aught 'tis but that you should make your

brother's house a pleasant resort for them that would be friendly with him and visit him. What harm can there be in receiving such with a cheerful welcome?—and having a pretty house-mistress and all things neat and conformable? Dear mouse, you so often lecture me that I must have my turn; and I do not find fault or cause of quarrel; 'tis but a wish that you would be less severe in your ways, and let your kind heart speak more freely. Men, that have the burden of the world's fight to bear, love to meet women-folk that have a merry and cheerful countenance—'twere a marvel else; and of an evening, when there is idleness, and some solace after the labours of the day, why should one be glum, and thinking ever of that next world that is coming soon enough of its own accord? Look you, now, how well the ruff becomes you; and what sin is in it? The girdle too—think you my mother would have worn it had there been aught of evil in a simple piece of leather and embroidery?"

"'Tis many a day since she put it aside, as I well remember," Prudence said—but with a smile, for she was easily won over.

"Truly," said Judith, with a touch of scorn, "the good preachers are pleased to meddle with small matters when they would tell a woman what she should wear, and order a maiden to give up a finger-ring or a bit of lace, on peril of losing her soul. These be marvellous small deer to be so hunted and stormed about with bell, book, and candle. But now, good Prudence, for this one evening I would have you please your visitor and entertain

him; and the spaniel-gentle—that, indeed, you must take from him——”

“I cannot, dear Judith; ’twas meant for you!” Prudence exclaimed.

“You cannot go back from your promise, good cousin,” Judith said, coolly, and with some slight inattention to facts. “’Twould be unmannerly of you to refuse the gift, or to refuse ample thanks for it either. And see you have plenty on the board, for men like good fare along with good company; and let there be no stint of wine or ale as they may choose, for your brother’s house, Prudence, must not be niggard, were it only for appearance sake.”

“But you will stay, dear Judith, will you not?” the other said, anxiously. “In truth you can entertain them all, wherever you go; and always there is such heart in the company——”

“Nay, I cannot, sweet mouse,” Judith said, lightly. “There is much for me to do now in the evenings, since Susan has gone back to her own home. And now I must go, lest your visitor arrive and find you unprepared: marry, you must wear the cuffs as they are, since I have hindered you in the ironing.”

“But you cannot go, Judith, till you have told me what happened to-day at the cottage,” the other pleaded.

“What happened? Why, nothing!” Judith said, brightly. “Only that my grandmother is of a mind with myself, that a fairer-spoken young gentleman seldom comes into these parts, and that, when he does, he should be made welcome. Bless thy heart, hadst thou but come in and seen how attentive the

good dame was to him; and she would press him to have some claret-wine, but he said no—perchance he guessed that good grandam had but small store of that. Nay, but you should have come in, Prudence—then would you assuredly have been conscience-smitten about all your dark surmisings. A murderer forsooth!—a ghost!—a phantom!—why, so civil was his manner that he but asked for a cup of water in passing, and my grandmother must needs have him come in out of the sun, and rest him, and have some milk. Was that like a ghost? I warrant you there was naught of the ghost about him when she put a solid repast before him on the table; ghosts make no such stout attacks on gooseberry tart and cheese, else they be sore belied.”

“But who and what is this man, Judith?”

“Why, who can tell what any man is?” said the other. “They all of them are puzzles, and unlike other human creatures. But this one—well, he hath a rare store of knowledge as to what is going forward at the Court—and among the players, too; and as we sate in the little bower there you would have sworn you could see before you the river Thames with a wonderful pageant on it—dolphins and whales, and crowned sea-queens and the like; and in the midst of them all the young Prince Henry: ‘Long live the young Prince Henry!’ they cried; and there was such a noise of drums and cannons and trumpets that you could scarce hear my grandmother’s bees among the flowers. I warrant you the good dame was well repaid for her entertainment, and right well pleased with the young gentle-

man: I should not marvel to find him returning thither, seeing that he can remain there in secrecy, and have such gossip as pleases him."

"But Judith, you know not what you do!" her friend protested anxiously. "Do you forget—nay, you cannot forget—that this was the very man the wizard prophesied that you should meet; and more than that, that he would be your husband!"

"My husband?" said Judith, with a flush of colour, and she laughed uneasily. "Nay, not so, good Prudence. He is not one that is likely to choose a country wench. Nay, nay, the juggler knave failed me—that is the truth of it; the charm was a thing of naught; and this young gentleman, if I met him by accident, the same might have happened to you, as I showed you before. Marry, I should not much crave to see him again, if anything like that were in the wind; this is Stratford town, 'tis not the forest of Arden; and in this neighbourhood a maiden may not go forth to seek her lover and coax him into the wooing of her. My father may put that into a play, but methinks if he heard of his own daughter doing the like the key would quickly be turned on her. Nay, nay, good Prue, you shall not fright me out of doing a civil kindness to a stranger, and one that is in misfortune, by flaunting his lovership before my eyes. There be no such thing: do not I know the tokens? By my life, this gentleman is too courteous to have a lover's mind with him!"

"And you will go and see him again, Judith?" her friend asked quickly.

“Nay, I said not that,” Judith answered, with some complacence. “’Tis not the forest of Arden—would to heaven it were, for then life would move to a pleasanter music! I said not that I would go forth and seek him—that were not maidenly; and belike there would come a coil of talking among the gossips, or soon or late; but at this time of the year, do you see, dear cousin, the country is fair to look upon; and the air is sweeter in the meadows than it is here in the town; and if a lone damsel, forsaken by all else, should be straying silent and forlorn along the pathway or by the river-side, and should encounter one that hath but lately made her acquaintance, why should not that acquaintance be permitted in all modesty and courtesy to ripen into friendship? The harm, good Prue; the harm of it? Tush, your head is filled with childish fears of the wizard; that is the truth; and had you but come into the house to-day, and had but five minutes’ speech of the young gentleman, you would have been as ready as any one to help in the beguilement of the tedium of his hiding, if that be possible to two or three silly women. And bethink you, was’t not a happy chance that I wore my new velvet cap this morning?”

But she had been speaking too carelessly and jestingly. This was a slip; and instantly she added—with some touch of confusion—

“I mean that I would fain have my father’s friends in London know that his family are not so far out of the world or out of the fashion.”

"Is he one of your father's friends, Judith?" Prudence said, gravely.

"He is a friend of my father's friends, at least," said she, "and some day, I doubt not, he will himself be one of these. Truly that will be a rare sight, some evening at New Place, when we confront you with him, and tell him how he was charged with being a ghost, or a pirate, or an assassin, or something of the like."

"Your fancy runs free, Judith," her friend said. "Is't a probable thing, think you, that one that dares not come forth into the day, that is hiding from justice, or perchance scheming in Catholic plots, should become the friend of your house?"

"You saw him not at my grandmother's board, good Prue," said Judith, coolly. "The young gentleman hath the trick of making himself at home wherever he cometh, I warrant you. And when this cloud blows away, and he is free to come to Stratford, there be none will welcome him more heartily than I; for methinks he holdeth Master Benjamin Jonson in too high consideration; and I would have him see what is thought of my father in the town, and what his estate is, and that his family, though they live not in London, are not wholly of Moll-the-milk-maid kind. And I would have Susan come over, too; and were she to forget her preachers and her psalms for but an evening, and were there any merriment going forward, the young gentleman would have to keep his wits clear, I'll be bound. There is the house, too, I would have him see; and the silver-topped tankard with the writing on it from

my father's good friends; nay, I warrant me Julius would not think of denying me the loan of the King's letter to my father—were it but for an hour or two——”

But here they were startled into silence by a knocking below; then there was the sound of a man's voice in the narrow passage.

“’Tis he, sweetheart,” Judith said, quickly, and she kissed her friend, and gave a final touch to the ruff and the cap. “Get you down and welcome him; I will go out when that you have shut the door of the room. And be merry, good heart, be merry—be brave and merry, as you love me!”

She almost thrust her out of the apartment, and listened to hear her descend the stairs; then she waited for the shutting of the chamber-door, and finally she stole noiselessly down into the passage and let herself out, without waiting for the little maid Margery.

CHAPTER XV.

A FIRST PERFORMANCE.

"NAY, zur," said the sour-visaged Matthew, as he leaned his chin and both hands on the end of a rake, and spoke in his slow-drawling grumbling fashion; "nay, zur, this country be no longer the country it wur; no, nor never will be again."

"Why, what ails the land?" said Judith's father, turning from the small table in the summer-house, and lying back in his chair, and crossing one knee over the other, as if he would give a space to idleness.

"Not the land, zur," rejoined Goodman Matthew, oracularly. "Not the land; it be the men that live in it; and that are all in such haste to make wealth, with plundering of the poor and of each other, that there's naught but lying and cheating and roguery—God a mercy, there never wur the loike in any country under the sun. Why, zur, in my vather's time, a pair o' shoes would wear you through all weathers for a year; but now, with their half-tanned leather, and their horse-hide, and their cat-skin for the inner sole, 'tis a marvel if the rotten leaves come not asunder within a month. And they be all aloike; the devil would have no choice among 'em; the clothmaker he hideth his bad wool wi'

liquid stuff; and the tailor, no matter whether it be doublet, cloak, or hose, he will filch you his quarter of the cloth ere you see it again; and the chandler—he be no better than the rest—he will make you his wares of stinking offal that will splutter and run over and do aught but give good light; and the vintner, marry, who knoweth not his tricks and knaveries of mixing and blending, and the selling of poison instead of honest liquor? The rogue butcher, too, he will let the blood soak in, ay, and puff wind into the meat—meat, quotha!—’tis as like as not to have been found dead in a ditch!”

“A bad case, indeed, good Matthew, if they be all preying on each other so.”

“’Tis the poor man pays for all, zur,” said Matthew, continuing his growlings (which, indeed, were for the most part but echoes of Stubbes, that had reached him through the Puritan preachers). “Though how he liveth to pay no man can tell, what with the landlords racking the rents, and enclosing the commons and pasturages—nay, ’tis a noble pastime the making of parks and warrens, and shutting the poor man out, that used to have his cow there and a pig or two; but no, now shall he not let a goose stray within the fence. And what help hath the poor man? May he go to the lawyers, with their leases and clauses that none can understand—ay, and their fists that must be well greased ere they set to the business? ’Tis the poor man pays for all, zur, I warrant ye; nor must he grumble when the gentleman goes a-hunting and

breaks down his hedges and tramples his corn. Corn? 'Tis the last thing they think of, beshrew me else! They are busiest of all in sending our good English grain—ay, and our English beef, and bacon, and tallow—beyond the seas; and to bring back what?—baubles of glass beads and amber, fans for my ladies, and new toys from Turkey! The proud dames—I would have their painted faces scratched!”

“What, what, good Matthew?” Judith’s father said, laughing. “What know you of the city ladies and their painting?”

“Nay, nay, zur, the London tricks be spread abroad, I warrant ye; there’s not a farmer’s wife nowadays but must have her French hood and her daughter a taffeta cap—marry, and a grogram gown lined through with velvet! And there be other towns in the land than London, to learn the London tricks; I have heard of the dames and their daughters; set them up with their pinching and girding with whalebone, to get a small waist withal!—ay, and the swallowing of ashes and candles and whatever will spoil their stomach to give them a pale-bleak colour. Lord, what a thing ’tis to be rich and in the fashion!—let the poor man suffer as he may. Corn, i’faith!—there be plenty of corn grown in the land, God wot; but ’tis main too dear for the poor man; the rack-rents for him, and a murrain on him; the corn for the fore-stallers and the merchants and gentlemen, that send it out of the country; and back come the silks and civets for proud Madam and her painted crew!”

"God have mercy on us, man!" Judith's father exclaimed, and he drove him aside, and got out into the sunlight. At the same moment he caught sight of Judith herself.

"Come hither, wench, come hither!" he called to her.

She was nothing loth. She had merely been taking some scraps to the Don; and seeing Matthew in possession there, she had not even stayed to look into the summer-house. But when her father came out and called to her, she went quickly towards him; and her eyes were bright enough—on this bright morning.

"What would you, father?"

For answer he plucked off her cap and threw it aside, and took hold of her by a bunch of her now loosened and short sun-brown curls.

"Father!" she protested (but with no great anger). "There be twenty minutes' work undone!"

"Where bought you those roses?" said he, sternly. "Answer me, wench!"

"I bought no roses, father!"

"The paint? Is't not painted? Where got you such a face, madam?"

"Father, you have undone my hair; and the parson is coming to dinner."

"Nay, I'll be sworn 'tis as honest a face as mother nature ever made. This Goodman Matthew hath belied you!"

"What said he of me?" she asked, with a flash of anger in her eyes.

Her father put his hand on her neck, and led her away.

"Nay, nay, come thy ways, lass; thou shalt pick me a handful of raspberries. And as for thine hair, let that be as God made it; 'tis even better so; and yet methinks"—here he stopped and passed his hand lightly once or twice over her head, so that any half-imprisoned curls were set free—"methinks," said he, regarding the pretty hair with considerable favour, "if you would as lief have some ornament for it, I saw that in London that would answer right well. 'T was a net-work kind of cap; but the netting so fine you could scarce see it; and at each point a bead of gold: now, Madam Vanity, what say you to that?—would you let your hair grow free as it is now, and let the sunlight play with it, were I to bring thee a fairy cap all besprinkled with gold?"

"I will wear it any way you wish, father, and right gladly," said she, "and I will have no cap at all if it please you."

"Nay, but you shall have the gossamer cap, wench; I will not forget it when next I go to London."

"I would you had never to go to London again," said she, rather timidly.

He regarded her for a second with a scrutinising look, and there was an odd sort of smile on his face.

"Why," said he, "I was but this minute writing about a man that had to use diverse arts and devices for the attainment of a certain end—yea, and devices that all the world would not approve of,

perchance; and that was ever promising to himself that when the end was gained he would put aside these spells and tricks, and be content to live as other men live, in a quiet and ordinary fashion. Wouldst have me live ever in Stratford, good lass?"

"The life of the house goes out when you go away from us," said she simply.

"Well, Stratford is no wilderness," said he cheerfully; "and I have no bitter feud with mankind that I would live apart from them. Didst ever think, wench," he added, more absently, "how sad a man must have been ere he could speak so—

'Happy were he could finish forth his fate
In some unhaunted desert, most obscure
From all societies, from love and hate
Of worldly folk; then might he sleep secure;
Then wake again, and ever give God praise,
Content with hips and haws and bramble-berry;
In contemplation spending all his days,
And change of holy thoughts to make him merry;
Where, when he dies, his tomb may be a bush,
Where harmless robin dwells with gentle thrush.'"

"Is it that you are writing now, father?"

"Nay, indeed," said he slowly, and a cloud came over his face. "That was written by one that was my good friend in bygone days; by one that was betrayed and done to death by lying tongues, and had but sorry favour shown him in the end by those he had served."

He turned away. She thought she heard him say "My noble Essex!" but she was mutely following him. And then he said—

"Come, lass; come pick me the berries!"

He kept walking up and down by himself, while her nimble fingers were busy with the bushes; and when she had collected a sufficiency of the fruit and brought it to him, she found that he appeared to be in no hurry this morning, but was now grown cheerful again, and rather inclined to talk to her. And she was far from telling him that her proper place at this moment was within-doors, to see that the maids were getting things forward: and if she bestowed a thought of any kind on the good parson, it was to the effect that both he and the dinner would have to wait. Her father had hold of her by the arm. He was talking to her of all kinds of things, as they slowly walked up and down the path—but of his friends in Stratford mostly, and their various ways of living: and this she conceived to have some reference to his project of withdrawing altogether from London and settling down for good amongst them. Indeed, so friendly and communicative was he on this clear morning—in truth, they were talking like brother and sister—that when at last he went into the summer-house she made bold to follow; and when he chanced to look at some sheets lying on the table, she said—

“Father, what is the story of the man with the devices?”

For an instant he did not understand what she meant; then he laughed.

“Nay, pay you no heed to such things, child.”

“And why should not I, father, seeing that they bring you so great honour?”

“Honour, say you?”—but then he seemed to

check himself. This was not Julius Shawe, to whom he could speak freely enough about the conditions of an actor's life in London. "Well, then, the story is of a banished Duke, a man of great wisdom and skill, and he is living on a desert island with his daughter—a right fair maiden she is, too, and she has no other companion in the world but himself——"

"But he is kind to her and good?" she said quickly.

"Truly."

"What other companion would she have, then? Is she not content — ay, and right well pleased withal?"

"Methinks the story would lag with but these," her father said, with a smile. "Would you not have her furnished with a lover—a young Prince and a handsome—one that would play chess with her, and walk with her, while her father was busy?"

"But how on a desert island? How should she find such an one?" Judith said—with her eyes all intent.

"There, you see, is where the magic comes in. What if her father have at his command a sprite, a goblin, that can work all wonders—that can dazzle people in the dark, and control the storm, and whistle the young Prince to the very feet of his mistress?"

Judith sighed, and glanced at the sheets lying on the table.

"Alas, good father, why did you aid me in my folly, and suffer me to grow up so ignorant?"

"Folly, fond wench!" said he, and he caught her by the shoulders, and pushed her out of the summer-house. "Thank God you have naught to do with any such stuff. There, go you and seek out Prudence, and get you into the fields, and give those pink roses in your cheeks an airing. Is't not a rare morning? And you would blear your eyes with books, silly wench? Get you gone—into the meadows with you—and you may gather me a nosegay if your fingers would have work."

"I must go indoors, father; good Master Blaise is coming to dinner," said she, "but I will bring you the nosegay in the afternoon, so please you. So fare you well," she added; and she glanced at him, "and pray you, sir, be kind to the young Prince."

He laughed and turned away; and she hurried quickly into the house. In truth, all through that day she had plenty to occupy her attention; but whether it was the maids that were asking her questions, or her mother seeking her help, or good Master Walter paying authoritative court to her, her eyes were entirely distraught. For they saw before them a strange island, with magic surrounding it, and two young lovers, and a grave and elderly man regarding them; and she grew to wonder how much more of that story was shut up in the summer-house, and to lament her misfortune in that she could not go boldly to her father and ask him to be allowed to read it. She felt quite certain that, could she but sit down within there and peruse these sheets for herself he would not say her nay; and from that

conclusion to the next—that on the first chance she would endeavour to borrow the sheets and have them read to her—was but an obvious step, and one that she had frequently taken before. Moreover, on this occasion, the chance came to her sooner than she could have expected. Towards dusk in the evening her father went out, saying that he was going along to see how the Harts were doing. Matthew gardener was gone home. The parson had left hours before, and her mother was in the brew-house and out of hearing. Finally, to crown her good fortune she discovered that the key had been left in the door of the summer-house; and so the next minute found her inside and on her knees.

It was a difficult task. There was scarcely any light, for she dared not leave the door open; and the mark that she put on the sheets, to know which she had carried to Prudence, was minute. And yet the sheets seemed to have been tossed into this receptacle in fairly regular order; and when at length, and after much straining of her eyes, she had got down to the marked ones, she was rejoiced to find that there remained above these a large bulk of unperused matter; and the question was as to how much it would be prudent to carry off. Further, she had to discover where there was some kind of division, so that the story should not abruptly break off; and she had acquired some experience in this direction. In the end, the portion of the play that she resolved upon taking with her was modest and small; there would be the less likelihood of detection; and it was just possible that she would

have no opportunity of returning the sheets that night.

And then she quickly got indoors, and put on her hood and muffler, and slipped out into the dusk. She found Prudence alone in the lower room, sitting sewing, the candles on the table being already lit; and some distance off, curled up and fast asleep on the floor, lay the little spaniel-gentle.

"Dear heart," said Judith, brightly, as she glanced at the little dog, "you have shown good sense after all; I feared me you would fall away from my wise counsel."

"My brother was well inclined to the little creature," Prudence said, with some embarrassment.

"And you had a right merry evening, I'll be bound," Judith continued, blithely. "And was there singing?—nay, he can sing well when he is in the mood—none better. Did he give you

‘There is a garden in her face
Where roses and white lilies grow’

—for Julius is more light-hearted in such matters than you are, dear mouse. And was there any trencher-business?—and wine? I warrant me Julius would not have his guest sit dry-throated. ’Twas a merry evening, in good sooth, sweetheart?"

"They talked much together," Prudence said, with her eyes cast down.

"*They* talked? Mercy on us, were you not civil to him? Did you not thank him prettily for the little spaniel?"

"In a measure I think ’twas Julius took the little creature from him," Prudence said, bashfully.

"Beshrew me now, but you know better!—'twas given to you, you know right well: a spaniel-gentle for your brother—as soon would he think of a farthingale and a petticoat! And what did he say? Had he aught special to say to you, gossip?"

"He would have me look at an ancient book he had, with strange devices on the leaves," Prudence said. "Truly, 'twas strange and wonderful, the ornamentation of it in gold and colours, though I doubt me 'twas the work of monks and priests. He would have me take it from him," she added, with a faint blush.

"And you would not, silly one?" Judith exclaimed, angrily.

"Would you have me place such Popish emblems alongside such a book as that that Dr. Hall gave me? Dear Judith, 'twould be a pollution, and a sin!"

"But you gave him thanks for the offer, then?"

"Of a surety; 'twas meant in friendship."

"Well, well; right glad am I to see the little beast lying there; and methinks your gentleness hath cast a spell o'er it already, or 'twould not rest so soundly. And now, dear mouse, I have come to tax your patience once more: see, here is part of the new play; and we must go to your chamber, dear Prue, lest some one come in and discover us."

Prudence laughed in her quiet fashion.

"I think 'tis you that casteth spells, Judith, else I should not be aiding thee in this perilous matter."

But she took one of the candles in her hand nevertheless, and led the way upstairs; and then,

when they had carefully bolted the door, Judith placed the roll of sheets on the table, and Prudence sate down to arrange and decipher them.

"But this time," Judith said, "have I less weight on my conscience, for my father hath already told me part of the story; and why should not I know the rest? Nay, but it promises well, I do assure thee, sweetheart; 'tis a rare beginning—the desert island, and the sprite that can work wonders, and the poor banished Duke and his daughter. Ay, and there comes a handsome young Prince, too; marry, you shall hear of marvels! For the sprite is one that can work magic at the bidding of the Duke, and be seen like a fire in the dark, and can lead a storm whither he lists——"

"'Tis with a storm that it begins," Prudence said, for now she had arranged the sheets.

And instantly Judith was all attention. It is true, she seemed to care little for the first scene and the squabbles between the sailors and the gentlemen; she was anxious to get to the enchanted island; and when, at length, Prudence introduced Prospero and Miranda, Judith listened as if a new world were being slowly opened before her. And yet not altogether with silence; for sometimes she would utter a few words of quick assent, or even explanation; but always so as not to interfere with the gentle-voiced reader. By and by, when the banished Duke had come to the end of his story, and when he had caused slumber to fall upon his daughter's eyes, and was about to summon Ariel, Judith interposed to give the patient reader a rest.

"And what say you, Prudence," said she, eagerly. "Is't not a beautiful story? Is she not a sweet and obedient maiden, and he a right noble and gentle father? Ah, there, now, they may talk about their masques and pageants of the Court, and gods and goddesses dressed up to saw the air with long speeches: see you what my father can tell you in a few words, so that you can scarcely wait but must on to hear the rest. And do I hurry you, good Prue? Will you to it again? For now the sprite is summoned that is to work the magic."

"Indeed 'tis no heavy labour, Judith," her friend said, with a smile. "And now here is your Ariel." She continued the reading.

"And hath he not done well, that clever imp!" Judith cried. "Nay, but my father shall reward him—that he shall—'twas bravely done and well. And now to bring the Prince to the maiden that hath never seen a sweetheart—that comes next, good Prue?—I marvel now what she will say?"

"'Tis not yet, Judith," her friend said, and she went on with her task, while Judith sate and regarded the dusky shadows beyond the flame of the candle as if the wonder-world were shining there. Then they arrived at Ariel's song, "Come unto these yellow sands," and all the hushed air around seemed filled with music; but it was distant somehow, so that it did not interfere with Prudence's gentle voice.

"But would he take her away?" said Judith, presently (but to herself, as it were). "Nay, never so! They must remain on the island—the two

happy lovers—with Ariel to wait on them: surely my father will so make it?"

Then, as it appeared, came trouble to check the too swift anticipations of the Prince, though Judith guessed that the father of Miranda was but feigning in his wrath; and when Prudence finally came to the end of such sheets as had been brought her, and looked up, Judith's eyes were full of confidence and pride—not only because she was sure that the story would end happily, but also because she would have her chosen gossip say something about what she had read.

"Well?" said she.

"'Tis a marvel," Prudence said, with a kind of sigh, "that shapes of the air can so take hold of us."

Judith smiled; there was something in her manner that Prudence did not understand.

"And Master Jonson, good Prue—that they call Ben Jonson—what of him?"

"I know not what you mean, Judith."

"Sure you know they make so much of him at the Court—and of his long speeches about Greece and Rome and the like—and when one comes into the country with news of what is going forward, by my life you'd think that Master Jonson were the only writer in the land! What say you, good Prue: could worthy Master Jonson invent you a scene like that?"

"In truth I know not, Judith; I never read aught of his writing."

Judith took over the sheets and carefully rolled them up.

"Why," said she, "'twas my father brought him forward; and had his first play taken in at the theatre!"

"But your father and he are great friends, Judith, as I am told; why should you speak against him?"

"I speak against him?" said Judith, as she rose; and there was an air of calm indifference on her face. "In truth I have naught to say against the good man. 'Tis well that the Court ladies are pleased with Demogorgons and such idle stuff; and 'tis passing well that he knows the trade. Now give ye good-night and sweet dreams, dear mouse; and good thanks, too, for the reading."

But at the door below—Prudence having followed her with the candle—she turned and said, in a whisper—

"Now, tell me true, good cousin: think you my father hath ever done better than this magic island, and the sweet Miranda, and the rest?"

"You know I am no judge of such matters, Judith," her friend answered.

"But, dear heart, were you not bewitched by it? Were you not taken away thither? Saw you not those strange things before your very eyes?"

"In good sooth, then, Judith," said the other, with a smile, "for the time being I knew not that I was in Stratford town, nor in our own country of England either."

Judith laughed lightly and quickly, and with a kind of pride too. And when she got home to her own room, and once more regarded the roll of

sheets before bestowing them away in a secret place, there was a fine bravery of triumph in her eyes. "Ben Jonson!" she said, but no longer with any anger—rather with a sovereign contempt. Then she locked up the treasure in her small cupboard of boxes, and went downstairs again to seek out her mother; and now her heart was quite recovered from its envy, and was beating warm and equably in its disposition towards all mankind; and her mind was full of a proud and perfect confidence. "Ben Jonson!" she said.

CHAPTER XVI.

BY THE RIVER.

THE next morning she was unusually demure, and yet merry withal. In her own chamber, as she chose out a petticoat of pale blue taffeta, and laid on the bed her girdle of buff-coloured leather, and proceeded to array herself in these and other braveries, it was to the usual accompaniment of thoughtless and quite inconsequent ballad-singing. At one moment it was "Green-sleeves was all my joy," and again, "Fair, fair, and twice so fair," or perhaps—

"An ambling nag, and a-down, a-down,
We have borne her away to Dargison."

But when she came to take forth from the cupboard of boxes the portion of the play she had locked up there the night before, and when she

carefully placed that in a satchel of dark blue velvet that she had attached to the girdle, she was silent; and when she went downstairs and encountered her mother there was a kind of anxious innocence on her face. The good parson (she explained) had remained so late on the previous afternoon, and there were so many things about the house she had to attend to, that she had been unable to get out into the fields, as her father had bade her, to bring him home some wild flowers. Besides, as every one knew, large dogs got weak in the hind legs if they were kept chained up too continuously; and it was absolutely necessary she should take Don Roderigo out for a run with her through the meadows if her father would permit.

"There be plenty of flowers in the garden, surely," her mother said, who was busy with some leather hangings, and wanted help.

"But he would liefer have some of the little wildlings, good mother," said Judith. "That I know right well, for he is pleased to see them lying on the table before him; and sometimes, too, he puts the names of them in his writing."

"How know you that?" was the immediate and sharp question.

"As I have heard, good mother," Judith said, with calm equanimity.

And then she went to the small mirror to see that her gray velvet cap and starched ruff were all right.

"What can your father want with wild flowers if

he is to remain the whole day at Warwick?" her mother said.

"Is my father going to Warwick?" she asked, quickly.

"If he be not already set forth."

She glanced at the window; there was neither horse nor serving-man waiting there. And then she hastily went out and through the backyard into the garden, and there, sure enough, was her father, ready booted for the road, and giving a few parting directions to his bailiff.

"Well, wench," he said, when he had finished with the man, "what would you?"

She had taken from her purse all the money she could find there.

"Good father," said she, "will you do this errand for me at Warwick?"

"More vanities?" said he. "I wonder you have no commissioner to despatch to Spain and Flanders. What is't then?—a muff of satin—a gimmel ring——"

"No, no, not so, father; I would have you buy for me a clasp-knife—as good a one as the money will get; and the cutler must engrave on the blade, or on the handle, I care not which, a message—an inscription, as it were—'tis but three words—*For Judith's Sweetheart*. Could you remember that, good father?—is't too much of a trouble?"

"How now?" said he. "For whom do you wish me to bring you such a token?"

"Nay, sir," said she, demurely, "would you have

me name names? The gift of a sweetheart to a sweetheart is a secret thing."

"You are a mad wench," said he (though doubtless he guessed for whom the knife was intended), and he called to Matthew gardener to go round and see if Master Shawe were not yet ready. "But now I bethink me, child, I have a message for thee. Good Master Walter spoke to me yesternight about what much concerns him—and you."

Instantly all her gay self-confidence vanished; she became confused, anxious, timid; and she regarded him as if she feared what his look or manner might convey.

"Yes, sir?" she said, in rather a low voice.

"Well, you know what the good man wishes," her father said, "and he speaks fairly, and reasoneth well. Your mother, too, would be right well pleased."

"And you, sir?" she said, rather faintly.

"I?" said he. "Nay, 'tis scarce a matter that I can say aught in. 'Tis for yourself to decide, wench; but were you inclined to favour the young parson I should be well pleased enough—indeed 'tis so—a good man and honest, as I take him to be—of fair attainment, and I know of none that bear him ill will, or have aught to say against him. Nay, if your heart be set that way, wench, I see no harm; you are getting on in years to be still in the unmarried state; and, as he himself says, there would be security in seeing you settled in a home of your own, and your future no longer open and undecided. Nay, nay, I see no harm. He reasons well."

"But, father, know you why he would have me become his wife?" Judith said, with a wild feeling overcoming her that she was drowning and must needs throw out her hands for help. "'Tis for no matter of affection that I can make out—or that he might not as well choose any other in the town—but 'tis that I should help him in his work—and—and—labour in the vineyard, as he said. In truth I am all unfit for such a task—there be many another far better fitted than I; my mother must know that right well. There is little that I would not do to please her; but surely we might all of us have just as much of the good man's company without this further bond. But what say you, father? What is your wish?" she added, humbly. "Perchance I could bring my mind to it if all were anxious that it should be so."

"Why, I have told thee, wench, thou must choose for thyself. 'Twould please your mother right well, as I say; and as for the duties of a parson's wife—nay, nay, they are none so difficult. Have no fears on that score, good lass; I dare be sworn you are as honest and well-minded as most, though perchance you make less profession of it." (The gratitude that sprang to her eyes, and shone there, in spite of her downcast face!) "Nor must you think the good parson has but that end in view; 'tis not in keeping with his calling that he should talk the language of romances. Consider it, wench, consider. And there is more for you to think of. Even if Master Blaise be no vehement lover, as some of the young rattlepates might be,

that is but a temporary thing; 'tis the long years of life that weigh for the most; and all through these you would be in an honourable station, well thought of and respected. Nay, there be many, I can tell thee, lass, that might look askance now at the player's daughter, who would be right glad to welcome the parson's wife."

"What say you, father?" said she—and she was so startled that the blood forsook her lips for a moment. "That—that there be those—who scorn the player's daughter—and would favour the parson's wife?" And then she instantly added, "I pray you, sir, did not you say that I was to decide for myself?"

"Truly, child, truly!" said he, somewhat wondering at her manner, for her face had grown quite pale.

"Then I have decided, father."

"And how? What answer will you have for Master Walter?"

She spoke slowly now, and with a distinctness that was almost harsh.

"This, so please you, sir—that the player's daughter shall not, and shall never, become the parson's wife, God helping her!"

"Why, how now, what a coil is this!" he exclaimed. "Good lass, 'twas not the parson that said aught of the kind. Lay not that to his charge, in fair honesty!"

"I have decided," she said, proudly and coldly. "Father, the horses are brought round—I can hear

them. You will not forget the knife, and the message on the blade?"

He looked at her and laughed—but in a kindly way; and he took her by the shoulder.

"Nay, now, wench, thou shalt not throw over the good man for a matter that was none of his bringing forward. And why should you wish to have less than the respect of all your neighbours, all and sundry, whatever be their views? In good sooth I meant to speak for the parson, and not to harm him; and when I have more time I must undo the ill that I have done him. So soften your heart, you proud one, and be thankful for the honour he would do you, and think over it, and be civil and grateful."

"Nay, I will be civil enough to the good minister," said she, with a return to her ordinary placid humour, "if he speak no more of making me his wife."

"He will win you yet, for as stubborn as you are," her father said, with a smile. "He hath a rare gift of reason; do not say nay too soon, wench, lest you have to recall your words. Fare you well, lass, fare you well!"

"And forget not the knife, good father. '*With Judith's love*,' or '*For Judith's Sweetheart*,' or what you will." And then she added, daringly: "'Tis for the young Prince Mamillius, if you must know, good sir."

He was just going away, but this caused him to stop for a second; and he glanced at her with a curious kind of suspicion. But her eyes had be-

come quite inscrutable. Whatever of dark mischief was within them was not to be made out but by further questioning, and for that he had now no time. So she was left alone, mistress of the field, and rather inclined to laugh at her own temerity, until it occurred to her that now she could go leisurely forth for her stroll along the banks of the Avon, taking the great dog with her.

Indeed her anger was always short-lived. Or perhaps it was the feeling that this danger was got rid of—that the decision was taken, and the parson finally and altogether left behind her—that now raised her spirits. At all events, as she went along the thoroughfare and cheerfully greeted those that met her, the neighbours said 'twas little wonder that Master William Shakespeare's second daughter put off the choosing of a mate for herself, for that she seemed to grow younger and more winsome every day. And she knew all the children by name, and had a word for them—scolding or merry as the case might be—when that she passed them by; and what with the clear sunlight of the morning, and the fresher atmosphere as she got out of the town, it seemed to herself as if all the air were filled with music.

“Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,”

she said or sang to herself; and she had not a trace of ill will in her mind against the parson (although she did not fail to recollect that she was a player's daughter); and she was admonishing the Don to

take good care of her, for that phantom conspirators and such like evil creatures might be about. And so she got down to the river-side; but she did not cross; she kept along by the path that followed the windings of the stream, between the wide meadows and the luxurious vegetation that overhung the current.

This English-looking landscape was at its fairest on this fair morning, for some heavy rain in the night had washed the atmosphere clear; everything seemed sharp and luminous; and the rows of trees along the summits of the distant and low-lying hills were almost black against the white and blue sky. Nearer her all the foliage of the wide-branching elms was stirring and rustling before a soft westerly breeze; the flooded river was of a tawny brown, while its banks were a wilderness of wild flowers between the stems of the stunted willows—straggling rose-bushes of white and red, tall masses of goose-grass all powdered over with cream-white blossom, a patch of fragrant meadow-sweet here and there, or an occasional blood-red poppy burning among the dark dull greens. And as for companions? Well, she caught a glimpse of a brood of ducks sidling along by the reeds, and tried to follow them, but the bushes shut them out from her sight. A mare and her foal, standing under the cool shadow of the trees, gazed blankly at her as she passed. Farther off there were some shorn sheep in the meadows, but she could see no shepherd. The harsh note of the corn-crake sounded somewhere in the long grass; and the bees were busy; and now

and again a blue-backed swallow would swoop by her and over the stream; while all around there was a smell of clover sweetening the westerly wind. At this moment she convinced herself she bore no ill will at all against the good parson: only that she had it in her mind that she would be well content to remain a player's daughter. Her condition, she imagined, was one that she did not desire to have bettered. Why, the air that touched her cheek was like velvet; and there could be nothing in the world fairer than the pink and white roses bestarring the bushes there; and the very pulse of her blood seemed to beat to an unheard and rhythmical and subtle tune. What was it her father had said? "I dare be sworn you are as honest and well-minded as most, though perchance you make less profession of it." She laughed to herself, with a kind of pride. And she was so well content that she wished she had little Willie Hart here that she might put her hand on his shoulder, and pet him, and convey to him some little of that satisfaction that reigned within her own bosom. No matter, he should have the clasp-knife—"with *Judith's love*,"—and right proud he would be of that, she made sure. And so she went idly on her way, sometimes with—

"Fair, fair, and twice so fair,
And fair as any may be,"

coming uncalled for into her head; and always with an eye to the various wild flowers, to see what kind of a nosegay she would be able to gather on her homeward walk.

But by and by her glances began to go farther afield. Master Leofric Hope, in his brief references to his own habits and condition at the farm, had incidentally remarked that of all his walks abroad he preferred the following of the path by the river-side, for there he was most secure from observation. Nay, he said that sometimes, after continued solitude, a longing possessed him to see a town—to see a populated place filled with a fair number of his fellow-creatures—and that he would come within sight of Stratford itself and have a look at the church, and the church spire, and the thin blue smoke rising over the houses. That, he said, was safer for him than coming over such an exposed thoroughfare as Bardon Hill; and then again, when he was of a mind to read—for this time he had brought one or two books with him—he could find many a sheltered nook by the side of the stream, where even a passer-by would not suspect his presence. Nor could Judith, on this fresh, warm, breezy morning, conceal from herself the true object of her coming forth. If she had tried to deceive herself the contents of the blue velvet satchel would have borne crushing testimony against her. In truth, she was now looking with some eagerness to find whether, on such a pleasant morning, it was possible that he could have remained within-doors, and with the very distinct belief that sooner or later she would encounter him.

Nor was she mistaken, though the manner of the meeting was unexpected. The mastiff happened to have gone on a yard or two in front of her, and

she was paying but little attention to the beast, when all of a sudden it stopped, became rigid, and uttered a low growl. She sprang forward and seized it by the collar. At the same instant she caught sight of some one down by the water's edge, where, but for this occurrence, he would doubtless have escaped observation. It was Leofric Hope without a doubt; for now he was clambering up through the bushes, and she saw that he had a small book in his hand.

"My good fortune pursues me, fair Mistress Judith," said he (but with a watchful eye on the dog), "that I should so soon again have an opportunity of meeting with you. But perchance your protector is jealous? He likes not strangers?"

"A lamb, sir, a very lamb!" Judith said, and she patted the dog, and coaxed him, and got him into a more friendly—or, at least, neutral and watchful—frame of mind.

"I marvel not you have come forth on such a morning," said he, regarding the fresh colour in her face. "'Tis a rare morning, and 'tis a rare chance for one that is a prisoner, as it were, that his dungeon is not four walls, but the wide spaces of Warwickshire. Will you go farther? May I attend you?"

"Nay, sir," said she, "I but came forth to look at the country and see what blossoms I could carry back to my father. I will go as far as the stile there and rest a few minutes, and return."

"'Tis like your kindness, sweet lady, to vouchsafe me a moment's conversation; a book is but a dull companion," said he, as they walked along to

the stile that formed part of a boundary hedge. And when they reached it she seated herself on the wooden bar with much content, and the mastiff lay down, stretching out his paws, while the young gentleman stood idly—but not carelessly—by. He seemed more than ever anxious to interest his fair neighbour, and so to beguile her into remaining.

“A dull companion,” he repeated, “it is; one would rather hear the sound of one’s voice occasionally. When I came along here this morning I should have been right glad even to have had a she shepherd say ‘Good-morrow’ to me——”

“A what, good sir?” she asked.

He laughed.

“Nay, ’tis a book the wits in London have much merriment over just now—a guide-book for the use of foreigners coming to this country—and there be plenty of them at present, in the train of the ambassadors. Marry, the good man’s English is none of the best. *‘For to ask the way’* is a chapter of the book; and the one traveller says to the other, *‘Ask of that she shepherd’*—in truth, the phrase hath been caught up by the town. But the traveller is of a pleasant and courteous turn; when that he would go to bed, he says to the chambermaid: ‘Draw the curtains, and pin them with a pin. My she friend, kiss me once, and I shall sleep the better. I thank you, fair maiden.’ Well, their English may be none of the best, but they have a royal way with them, some of those foreigners that come to our Court. When the Constable of Castile was at the great banquet at Whitehall—doubtless

you heard of it, sweet Mistress Judith?—he rose and drank the health of the Queen from a cup of agate of extraordinary value, all set with diamonds and rubies, and when the King had drunk from the same cup the Constable called a servant, and desired that the cup should be placed on his Majesty's buffet, to remain there: was't not a royal gift? And so likewise he drank the health of the King from a beautiful dragon-shaped cup of crystal all garnished with gold; but he drank from the cover only, for the Queen, standing up, drank the pledge from the cup itself; and then he would have that in turn transferred to her buffet, as he had given the other one to the King."

"My father," said she, with much complacent good-nature—for she had got into the way of talking to this young gentleman with a marvellous absence of restraint or country shyness—"hath a tankard of great age and value, and on the silver top of it is a tribute engraved from many of his friends—truly, I would that you could come and see it, good sir—and—and—my father, too, he would make you welcome, I doubt not. And what book is it," she continued, with a smile, "that you have for companion, seeing that there be no she shepherd for you to converse withal?"

"'Tis but a dull affair," said he, scarce looking at it, for Judith's eyes were more attractive reading. "And yet if the book itself be dull, there is that within its boards that is less so. Perchance you have not heard of one Master Browne, a young

Devonshire gentleman, that hath but late come to London, and that only for a space, as I reckon?"

"No, sir——" she said, hesitatingly.

"The young man hath made some stir with his poems," he continued, "though there be none of them in the booksellers' hands as yet. And as it has been my good fortune to see one or two of them—marry, I am no judge, but I would call them excellent and of much modesty and grace—I took occasion to pencil down a few of the lines, inside the cover of this little book. May I read them to you, Mistress Judith?"

"If it please you, good sir."

He opened the book, and she saw that there were some lines pencilled on the gray binding; but they must have been familiar to him, for he scarce took his eyes from Judith's face as he repeated them.

"They are a description," said he, "of one that must have been fair indeed:

'Her cheeks, the wonder of what eye beheld,
Begot betwixt a lily and a rose,
In gentle rising plains divinely swelled,
Where all the graces and the loves repose.
Nature in this piece all her works excelled,
Yet showed herself imperfect in the close,
For she forgot (when she so fair did raise her)
To give the world a wit might duly praise her.

'When that she spoke, as at a voice from heaven
On her sweet words all ears and hearts attended;
When that she sung, they thought the planets seven
By her sweet voice might well their tunes have mended;
When she did sigh, all were of joy bereaven;
And when she smiled, heaven had them all befriended:

If that her voice, sighs, smiles, so many thrilled,
O, had she kissed, how many had she killed!"

"'Tis a description of a lady of the Court?" Judith asked, timidly.

"No, by heavens," he said, with warmth, "the bonniest of our English roses are they that grow in the country air!"—and his glance of admiration was so open and undisguised, and the application of his words so obvious, that her eyes fell, and, in spite of herself, the colour mounted to her cheeks. In her embarrassment she sought safety in the blue velvet satchel. She had contemplated some other way of introducing this latest writing of her father's; but now that had all fled from her brain. She knew that the town gentlemen were given to flattery; but then she was not accustomed to it. And she could not but swiftly surmise that he had written down these lines with the especial object of addressing them to her, when he should have the chance.

"Good sir," said she, endeavouring to hide this brief embarrassment by assuming a merry air, "a fair exchange, they say, is no robbery. Methinks you will find something here that will outweigh good Master Browne's verses—in bulk, if not in merit."

He gazed in astonishment at the parcel of sheets she handed to him, and he but glanced at the first page when he exclaimed—

"Why, I have heard naught of this before."

"Nay, sir," said she, with a calm smile, "the infant is but young—but a few weeks, as I take it—it hath had but little chance of making a noise in

the world as yet? Will you say what you think of it?"

But now he was busy reading. Then by and by she recollected something of the manner in which she had meant to introduce the play.

"You see, sir, my father has many affairs on his hands; 'tis not all his time he can give to such things. And yet I have heard that they be well spoken of in London—if not by the wits, perchance, or by the Court ladies, at least by the common people and the prentices. We in these parts have but little skill of learning; but—but methinks 'tis a pretty story—is it not, good sir?—and perchance as interesting as a speech from a goddess among the clouds?"

"In truth, it is a rare invention," said he, but absently, for his whole and rapt attention was fixed on the sheets.

She, seeing him so absorbed, did not interfere further. She sate still and content—perhaps with a certain sedate triumph in her eyes. She listened to the rustling of the elms overhead, and watched the white clouds slowly crossing the blue, and the tawny-hued river lazily and noiselessly stealing by below the bushes. The corn-crake was silent now—there was not even that interruption; and when the bell in the church-tower began to toll, it was so soft and faint and distant that she thought it most likely he would not even hear it. And at what point was he now? At the story of how the sweet Miranda came to grow up in exile? Or listening to Ariel's song? Or watching the Prince approach this new wonder

of the magic island? Her eyes were full of triumph. "Ben Jonson!" she had said.

But suddenly he closed the sheets together.

"It were unmannerly so to keep you waiting," said he.

"Nay, heed not that, good sir," she said, instantly. "I pray you go on with the reading. How like you it? 'Tis a pretty story, methinks; but my father hath been so busy of late—what with acres, and tithes, and sheep, and malt, and the like—that perchance he hath not given all his mind to it——"

"It is not for one such as I, fair Mistress Judith," said he, with much modesty, "to play the critic when it is your father's writing that comes forward. Beshrew me, there be plenty of that trade in London, and chiefly the feeble folk that he hath driven from our stage. No, sweet lady; rather consider me one of those that crowd to see each new piece of his, and are right thankful for aught he pleaseth to give us."

"Is that so?" said she; and she regarded him with much favour, which he was not slow to perceive.

"Why," said he, boldly, "what needs your father to heed if some worshipful Master Scoloker be of opinion that the play of the Prince Hamlet belongeth to the vulgar sort, and that the Prince was but moon-sick; or that some one like Master Greene—God rest his soul, wherever it be!—should call him an upstart crow, and a Johannes factotum, and the like? 'Tis what the people of England think that is of import; and right sure am I what they would

say—that there is no greater writer than your father now living in the land.”

“Ah, think you so?” she said, quickly, and her face grew radiant, as it were, and her eyes were filled with gratitude.

“This Master Greene,” he continued, “was ever jibing at the players, as I have heard, and bidding them be more humble, for that their labour was but mechanical, and them attracting notice through wearing borrowed plumes. Nay, he would have it that your father was no more than that—poor man, he lived but a sorry life, and ’twere ill done to cherish anger against him; but I remember to have seen the apology that he that published the book made thereafter to your father—in good truth, it was fitting and right that it should be printed and given to the world; and, though I forget the terms of it, ’twas in fair praise of Master William Shakespeare’s gentle demeanour, and his uprightness of conduct, and the grace of his wit.”

“Could you get that for me, good sir?” said she, eagerly. “Is’t possible that I could get it?” And then she stopped in some embarrassment, for she remembered that it was not becoming she should ask this stranger for a gift. “Nay, sir, ’twould be of little use to me, that have no skill of reading.”

“But I pray you, sweet Mistress Judith, to permit me to bring you the book—’twill be something, at least, for you to keep and show to your friends——”

“If I might show it to Prudence Shawe, I could return it to you, good sir,” said she; and then she

added: "Not that she—no, nor any one in Stratford town—would need any such testimony to my father's qualities, that are known to all."

"At least they seem to have won him the love and loyalty of his daughter," said he, gallantly; "and they know most about a man who live nearest him. Nay, but I will beg you to accept the book from me when I can with safety get to London again; 'twill be a charge I am not likely to forget. And in return, fair Mistress Judith, I would take of you another favour, and a greater."

"In what manner, gentle sir?"

"I have but glanced over this writing, for fear of detaining you, and but half know the value of it," said he. "I pray you let me have it with me to my lodging for an hour or two, that I may do it justice. When one hath such a chance come to him, 'tis not to be lightly treated; and I would give time and quiet to the making out the beauties of your father's latest work."

She was at first somewhat startled by this proposal; and almost involuntarily was for putting forth her hand to receive the sheets again into safe keeping; but then she asked herself what harm there could be in acceding to his request. She was eagerly anxious that he should understand how her father—even amidst those multifarious occupations that were entailed on him by his prominent position in the town—could, when he chose, sit down and write a tale far exceeding in beauty and interest any of the mummeries that the Court people seemed to talk about. Why should not he have a few hours'

time to study this fragment withal? Her father was gone to Warwick for the day. Nay, more, she had taken so small a portion of what had been cast aside that she knew the absence of it would not be noticed, however long it might be kept. And then this young gentleman, who was so civil and courteous, and who spoke so well of her father, was alone, and to be pitied for that he had so few means of beguiling the tedium of his hiding.

"In the afternoon," said he, seeing that she hesitated, "I could with safety leave it at your grandmother's cottage; and then, perchance, you might send some one for it. Nay, believe me, sweet Mistress Judith, I know the value of that I ask; but I would fain do justice to such a treasure."

"You would not fail me, sir, in leaving it at the cottage?" said she.

"You do me wrong, Mistress Judith, to doubt—in good sooth you do. If you can find a trusty messenger——"

"Nay, but I will come for it myself, good sir, and explain to my grandmother the nature of the thing, lest she suspect me of meddling with darker plots. Let it be so, then, good sir—for now I must get me back to the town. I pray you, forget not to leave the package; and so—farewell!"

"But my thanks to you, dear lady——"

"Nay, sir," said she, with a bright look of her eyes, "bethink you you have not yet fairly made out the matter. Tarry till you have seen whether these sheets be worth the trouble—whether they remind you in aught of the work of your friend Master

Jonson — and then your thanks will be welcome. Give ye good-day, gentle sir!”

There was no thought in her mind that she had done anything imprudent in trusting him with this portion of the play for the matter of an hour or two; it was but a small equivalent, she recollected, for his promise to bring her from London the retraction or apology of one of those who had railed at her father, or abetted in that, and found himself constrained by his conscience to make amends. And now it occurred to her that it would look ill, if, having come out to gather some wild flowers for the little table in the summer-house, she returned with empty hands; so, as she proceeded to walk leisurely along the winding path leading back to the town, she kept picking here and there such blossoms as came within her reach. If the nosegay promised to be somewhat large and straggling, at least it would be sweet-scented; and she felt pretty sure that her father would be well content with it. At first she was silent, however; her wonted singing was abandoned; perchance she was trying to recall something of the lines that Master Leofric Hope had repeated to her—with so marked an emphasis.

“And what said he of our English roses?” she asked herself, with some faint colour coming into her face at the mere thought of it.

But then she forcibly dismissed these recollections—feeling that that was due to her own modesty—and busied herself with her blossoms and sprays; and presently, as she set out in good earnest for the town, she strove to convince herself that there was

nothing more serious in her brain than the tune of Green-sleeves—

“Green-sleeves, now farewell, adieu,
God I pray to prosper thee;
For I am still thy lover true—
Come once again and love me!”

CHAPTER XVII.

WILD WORDS.

HER light-heartedness did not last long. In the wide clear landscape a human figure suddenly appeared, and the briefest turn of her head showed her that Tom Quiney was rapidly coming towards her across the fields. For a second her heart stood still. Had he been riding home from Ludington? Or from Bidford? Was it possible that he had come over Bardon Hill, and from that height espied the two down by the river? She could not even tell whether that was possible—or what he had done with his horse—or why he had not interfered sooner, if he was bent on interfering; but she had an alarmed impression that this rapid approach of his boded trouble, and she had not long to wait before that fear was confirmed.

“Judith, who is that man?” he demanded, with a fury that was but half held in.

She turned, and faced him.

“I knew not,” she said, coldly and slowly, “that we were on a speaking platform.”

"'Tis no time to bandy words," said he—and his face was pale, for he was evidently striving to control the passion with which his whole figure seemed to quiver from head to heel. "Who is that man, I ask? Who is he, that you come here to seek him, and alone?"

"I know not by what right you put such questions to me," she said—but she was somewhat frightened.

"By what right? And you have no regard, then, for your good name?"

There was a flash in her eyes. She had been afraid: she was no longer afraid.

"My good name?" she repeated. "I thank God 'tis in none of your keeping!"

In his madness he caught her by the wrist.

"You shall tell me——"

"Unhand me, sir!" she exclaimed, and she threw off his grasp, while her cheeks burned with humiliation.

"Nay, I quarrel not with women," said he. "I crave your pardon. But, by God, I will get to know that man's name and purpose here if I rive it from his body!"

So he strode off—in the direction that Leofric Hope had taken; and for a moment she stood quite terror-stricken and helpless, scarcely daring to think of what might happen. A murder on this fair morning? This young fellow, that was quite beside himself in his passion of jealous anger, was famed throughout the length and breadth of Warwickshire for his wrestling prowess. And the other—would

he brook high words? These things flashed across her mind in one bewildering instant, and in her alarm she forgot all about her pride. She called to him.

"I pray you—stay!"

He turned and regarded her.

"Stay," said she, with her face afire. "I—I will tell you what I know of him—if you will have it so."

He approached her—with seeming reluctance, and with anger and suspicion in his lowering look. He was silent, too.

"Indeed there is no harm," said she (and still with her face showing her mortification that she was thus forced to defend herself). "'Tis a young gentleman that is in some trouble—his lodging near Bidford is also a hiding, as it were—and—and I know but little of him beyond his name, and that he is familiar with many of my father's friends in London."

"And how comes it that you seek him out here, alone?" said he. "That is a becoming and maidenly thing!"

"I promised you I would tell you what I know of the young gentleman," said she, with scornful lips. "I did not promise to stand still and suffer your insolence."

"Insolence?" he exclaimed, as if her audacity bewildered him.

"How know you that I sought him out!" she said, indignantly. "May not one walk forth of a summer morning without being followed by suspi-

cious eyes—I warrant me, eyes that are only too glad to suspect! To think evil is an easy thing, it seems, with many: I wonder, sir, you are not ashamed!”

“You brave it out well,” said he, sullenly; but it was evident that her courage had impressed him, if it still left him angered and suspicious.

And then he asked—

“How comes it that none of your friends or your family know aught of this stranger?”

“I marvel you should speak of my family,” she retorted. “I had thought you were inclined to remain in ignorance of them of late. But had you asked of Prudence Shawe, she might have told you something of this young gentleman; or had you thought fit to call in at my grandmother’s cottage, you might perchance have found him seated there, and a welcome guest at her board. Marry, ’tis easier far to keep aloof and to think evil, as one may see!”

And then she added—

“Well, sir, are you satisfied? May I go home without further threats?”

“I threatened you not, Judith,” said he, rather more humbly. “I would have my threats kept for those that would harm you.”

“I know of none such,” she said distinctly. “And as for this young gentleman—that is in misfortune—such as might happen to any one—and not only in hiding, but having entrusted his secret to one or two of us that pity him and see no harm in him—I say it were a cruel and unmanly thing to spy out

his concealment, or to spread the rumour of his being in the neighbourhood——”

“Nay, you need not fear that of me, Judith,” said he. “Man to man is my way, when there is occasion. But can you marvel if I would have you for your own sake avoid any further meetings with this stranger? If he be in hiding let him remain there, in God’s name; I for one will set no beagles to hunt him out. But as for you, I would have you hold aloof from such dangerous traps.”

“Good sir,” said she, “I have my conduct in my own keeping, and can answer to those that have the guardianship of me.”

He did not reply to this rebuke. He said—

“May I walk back to the town with you, Judith?”

“You forget,” she said, coldly, “that if we were seen together the gossips might say I had come out hither to seek you, and alone.”

But he paid no heed to this taunt.

“I care not,” said he, with an affectation of indifference, “what the gossips in Stratford have to talk over. Stratford and I are soon to part.”

“What say you?” said she, quickly—and they were walking on together now, the Don leisurely following at their heels.

“Nay, ’tis nothing,” said he, carelessly; “there are wider lands beyond the seas where a man can fight for his own and hold it.”

“And you?” said she. “You have it in your mind to leave the country?”

“Marry, that have I!” said he, gaily. “My good friend Daniel Hutt hath gotten together a rare re-

giment, and I doubt not I shall be one of the captains of them ere many years be over."

Her eyes were downcast, and he could not see what impression this piece of news had made upon her—if, indeed, he cared to look. They walked for some time in silence.

"It is no light matter," said she at length, and in rather a low voice, "to leave one's native land."

"As for that," said he, "the land will soon be not worth the living in. Why, in former times, men spoke of the merry world of England. A merry world?—I trow the canting rogues of preachers have left but little merriment in it; and now they would seek to have all in their power, and to flood the land with their whining and psalm-singing, till we shall have no England left us, but only a vast conventicle. Think you that your father hath any sympathy with these? I tell you no; I take it he is an Englishman, and not a conventicle-man. 'Tis no longer the England of our forefathers, when men may neither hawk nor hunt, and women are doomed to perdition for worshipping the false idol starch, and the very children be called in from their games of a Sunday afternoon. God-a-mercy, I have had enough of Brother Patience-in-suffering, and his dominion of grace!"

This seemed to Judith a strange reason for his going away, for he had never professed any strong bias one way or the other in these religious dissensions; his chief concern, like that of most of the young men in Stratford, lying rather in the direction of butt-shooting, or wrestling, or having a romp with

some of the wenches to the tune of Packington's Pound.

"Nay, as I hear," said he, "there be some of them in such discontent with the King and the Parliament that they even talk of transplanting themselves beyond seas, like those that went to Holland: 'twere a goodly riddance if the whole gang of the sour-faced hypocrites went, and left to us our own England. And a fair beginning for the new country across the Atlantic—half of them these puritanical rogues, with their fastings and preachments; and the other half the constable's brats and broken men that such as Hutt are drafting out: a right good beginning, if they but keep from seizing each other by the throat in the end! No matter: we should have our England purged of the double scum!"

"But," said Judith, timidly, "methought you said you were going out with these same desperate men?"

"I can take my life in my hand as well as another," said he, gloomily; and then he added: "They be none so desperate, after all. Broken men there may be amongst them, and many against whom fortune would seem to have a spite; perchance their affairs may mend in the new country."

"But your affairs are prosperous," Judith said—though she never once lifted her eyes. "Why should you link yourself with such men as these?"

"One must forth to see the world," said he; and he went on to speak in a gay and reckless fashion of the life that lay before him, and of its possible adventures and hazards and prizes. "And what,"

said he, "if one were to have good fortune in that far country, and become rich in land, and have good store of corn and fields of tobacco; what if one were to come back in twenty years' time to this same town of Stratford, and set up for the trade of gentleman?"

"Twenty years?" said she, rather breathlessly. "'Tis a long time; you would find changes."

"None that would matter much, methinks," said he, indifferently.

"There be those that will be sorry for your going away," she ventured to say—and she forced herself to think only of Prudence Shawe.

"Not one that will care a cracked three-farthings!" was the answer.

"You do ill to say so—indeed you do!" said she, with just a touch of warmth in her tone. "You have many friends; you serve them ill to say they would not heed your going."

"Friends?" said he. "Yes, they will miss me at the shovel-board, or when there is one short at the catches."

"There be others than those," said she, with some little hesitation.

"Who, then?" said he.

"You should know yourself," she answered. "Think you that Prudence, for one, will be careless as to your leaving the country?"

"Prudence?" said he, and he darted a quick glance at her. "Nay, I confess me wrong there; for there is one that hath a gentle heart, and is full of kindness."

"Right well I know that—for who should know better than I?" said Judith. "As true a heart as any in Christendom, and a prize for him that wins it, I warrant you. If it be not won already," she added, quickly. "As to that, I know not."

They were now nearing the town—they could hear the dull sound of the mill, and before them was the church spire among the trees, and beyond that the gray and red huddled mass of houses, barns, and orchards.

"And when think you of going?" she said, after a while.

"I know not, and I care not," said he, absently. "When I spoke of my acquaintances being indifferent as to what might befall me, I did them wrong, for in truth there be none of them as indifferent as I am myself."

"'Tis not a hopeful mood," said she, "to begin the making of one's fortunes in a new country withal. I pray you, what ails this town of Stratford, that you are not content?"

"It boots not to say, since I am leaving it," he answered. "Perchance in times to come, when I am able to return to it, I shall be better content. And you?"

"And I?" she repeated, with some surprise.

"Nay, you will be content enough," said he, somewhat bitterly. "Mother church will have a care of you. You will be in the fold by then. The faithful shepherd will have a charge over you to keep you from communication with the children of

anger and the devil, that rage without like lions seeking to destroy."

"I know not what you mean," said she, with a hot face.

"Right well you know," said he, coolly; but there was an angry resentment running through his affected disdain as he went on: "There be those that protest, and go forth from the church. And there be those that protest, and remain within—eating the fat things, and well content with the milk and the honey, and their stores of corn and oil. Marry, you will be well provided for—the riches of the next world laid up in waiting for you; and a goodly share of the things of this world to beguile the time withal. Nay, I marvel not; 'tis the wisdom of the serpent along with the innocence of the dove. What matters the surplice, the cross in baptism, and the other relics of Popery, if conformity will keep the larder full? Better that than starvation in Holland, or seeking a home beyond the Atlantic—where belike the children of the devil might prove over-rude companions! I marvel not, I; 'tis a foolish bird that forsakes a warm nest."

And now she well knew against whom his bitter speech was levelled; and some recollection of the slight he had put upon her in the churchyard came into her mind, with the memory that it had never been atoned for. And she was astounded that he had the audacity to walk with her now and here, talking as if he were the injured one. The sudden qualm that had filled her heart when he spoke of leaving the country was put aside; the kindly re-

ference to Prudence was forgotten, she only knew that this sarcasm of his was very much out of place, and that this was far from being the tone in which he had any right to address her.

"I know not," said she, stiffly, "what quarrel you may have with this or that section of the church; but it concerns me not. I pray you attack those who are better able to defend themselves than I am, or care to be. Methinks your studies in that line have come somewhat late."

"'Tis no greater marvel," said he, "than that you should have joined yourself to the assembly of the saints: it was not always so with you."

"I?" she said; but her cheeks were burning, for well she knew that he referred to his having seen her with the parson on that Sunday morning, and she was far too proud to defend herself. "Heaven help me, now, but I thought I was mistress of my own actions!"

"In truth you are, Mistress Judith," said he, humbly (and this was the first time that he had ever addressed her so, and it startled her, for it seemed to suggest a final separation between them—something as wide and irrevocable as that twenty years of absence beyond the seas). And then he said: "I crave your pardon if I have said aught to offend you, and would take my leave."

"God be wi' you," said she, civilly; and then he left—striking across the meadows towards the Bidford road, and, as she guessed, probably going to seek his horse from whomsoever he had left it with.

And as she went on and into the town she was wondering what Prudence had said to him that should so suddenly drive him to think of quitting the country. All had seemed going well. As for Master Leofric Hope, his secret was safe; this late companion of hers seemed to have forgotten him altogether in his anger against the good parson. And then she grew to think of the far land across the ocean that she had heard vaguely of from time to time, and to think how twenty years could be spent there, and what Stratford would be like when that long space was over.

"Twenty years," she said to herself, with a kind of sigh. "There are many things will be settled ere that time be passed, for good or ill."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CONJECTURE.

WHEN she got back to New Place she found the house in considerable commotion. It appeared that the famous divine, Master Elihu Izod, had just come into the town, being on his way towards Leicestershire, and that he had been brought by the gentleman whose guest he was to pay a visit to Judith's mother. Judith had remarked ere now that the preachers and other godly persons who thus honoured the New Place generally made their appearance a trifling time before the hour of dinner; and now, as she reached the house, she was not surprised to

find that Prudence had been called in to entertain the two visitors—who were at present in the garden—while within-doors her mother and the maids were hastily making such preparations as were possible. To this latter work she quickly lent a helping hand; and in due course of time the board was spread with a copious and substantial repast, not forgetting an ample supply of wine and ale for those that were that way inclined. Then the two gentlemen were called in; Prudence was easily persuaded to stay; and, after a lengthened grace, the good preacher fell to, seasoning his food with much pious conversation.

At such times Judith had abundant opportunities for reverie, and for a general review of the situation of her own affairs. In fact, on this occasion, she seemed in a manner to be debarred from participation in these informal services at the very outset. Master Izod, who was a tall, thin, dark, melancholy-visaged man—unlike his companion Godfrey Buller, of the Leas, near to Hinckley, who, on the contrary, was a stout yeoman-like person, whose small gray absent eyes remained motionless and vacant in the great breadth of his rubicund face—had taken for his text, as it were, a list he had found somewhere or other of those characters that were entitled to command the admiration and respect of all good people. These were: a young saint; an old martyr; a religious soldier; a conscionable statesman; a great man courteous; a learned man humble; a silent woman; a merry companion without vanity; a friend not changed with honour; a sick man cheerful; a

soul departing with comfort and assurance. And as Judith did not make bold to claim to be any one of these—nor, indeed, to have any such merits or excellences as would extort the approval of the membership of the saints—she gradually fell away from listening; and her mind was busy with other things; and her imagination, which was vivid enough, intent upon other scenes. One thing that had struck her the moment she had returned was that Prudence seemed in an unusually cheerful mood. Of course, the arrival of two visitors was an event in that quiet life of theirs; and no doubt Prudence was glad to be appointed to entertain the strangers—one of them, moreover, being of such great fame. But so pleased was she, and so cheerful in her manner, that Judith was straightway convinced there had been no quarrel between her and Tom Quiney. Nay, when was there time for that? He could scarcely have seen her that morning; while the night before there had certainly been no mention of his projected migration to America, else Prudence would have said as much. What, then, had so suddenly driven him to the conclusion that England was no longer a land fit to live in? And why had he paid Prudence such marked attention—why had he presented her with the spaniel-gentle and offered her the emblazoned missal—one evening, only to resolve the next morning that he must needs leave the country? Nay, why had he so unexpectedly broken the scornful silence with which he had recently treated herself? He had given her to understand that, as far as he was concerned, she did not

exist. He seemed determined to ignore her presence. And yet she could not but remember that, if this contemptuous silence on his part was broken by the amazement of his seeing her in the company of a stranger, his suspicions in that direction were very speedily disarmed. A few words, and they fled. It was his far more deadly jealousy of the parson that remained, and was like to remain; for she certainly would not stoop to explain that the meeting in the churchyard was quite accidental. But why should he trouble his head about either her or the parson? Had he not betaken himself elsewhere—and that with her right good will? Nay, on his own confession, he had discovered how kind and gentle Prudence was: there was a fit mate for him—one to temper the wildness and hot-headedness of his youth. Judith had never seen the sea, and therefore had never seen moonlight on the sea; but the nearest to that she could go, in thinking of what Prudence's nature was like, in its restful and sweet and serious beauty, was the moonlight she had seen on the river Avon, in the calm of a summer's night, the water unbroken by a ripple, and not a whisper among the reeds. Could he not perceive that, too, and understand?

As for herself, she knew that she could at any moment cut the knot of any complications that might arise by allowing Master Walter to talk her over into marrying him. Her father had assured her that the clear-headed and energetic young parson was quite equal to that. Well, it was about time she should abandon the frivolities and

coquetries of her youth; and her yielding would please many good people, especially her mother and sister; and obtain for herself a secure and established position, with an end to all these quarrels, and jealousies, and uncertainties. Moreover, there would be safety there. For, if the truth must be told, she was becoming vaguely and uncomfortably conscious that her relations with this young gentleman who had come secretly into the neighbourhood were no longer what they had been at first. Their friendship had ripened rapidly; for he was an audacious person, with plenty of self-assurance; and, with all his professions of modesty, and deference, he seemed to know very well that he could make his society agreeable. Then those lines he had repeated: why, her face grew warm now as she thought of them. She could not remember them exactly, but she remembered their purport; and she remembered, too, the emphasis with which he had declared that the bonniest of our English roses were those that grew in the country air. Now a young man cut off from his fellows as he was might well be grateful for some little solace of companionship, or for this or the other little bit of courtesy; but he need not (she considered) show his gratitude just in that way. Doubtless, his flattery might mean little; the town gentlemen, she understood, talked in that strain; and perhaps it was only by an accident that the verses were there in the book; but still she had the uneasy feeling that there was something in his manner and speech that, if encouraged, or suffered to continue without check, might lead to embarrass-

ment. That is to say, if she continued to see him; and there was no need for that. She could cut short this acquaintance the moment she chose. But on the one hand she did not wish to appear uncivil; and on the other she was anxious that he should see the whole of this play that her father had written—thrown off, as it were, amid the various cares and duties that occupied his time. If Master Leofric Hope talked of Ben Jonson when he came into the country, she would have him furnished with something to say of her father when he returned to town.

These were idle and wandering thoughts; and in one respect they were not quite honest. In reality she was using them to cloak and hide, or to drive from her mind altogether, a suspicion that had suddenly occurred to her that morning, and that had set her brain afire in a wild way. It was not only the tune of *Green-sleeves* that was in her head as she set off to walk home, though she was trying to force herself to believe that. The fact is this: when Master Leofric Hope made the pretty speech about the country roses he accompanied it, as has been said, by a glance of only too out-spoken admiration; and there was something in this look—apart from the mere flattery of it—that puzzled her. She was confused, doubtless; but in her confusion it occurred to her that she had met that too eloquent glance somewhere before. She had no time to pursue this fancy further; for, in order to cover her embarrassment, she had betaken herself to the sheets in her satchel; and thereafter she was so anxious that he should think well of the play that

all her attention was fixed on that. But after leaving him, and having had a minute or two to think over what had happened, she recalled that look, and wondered why there should be something strange in it. And then a startling fancy flashed across her mind—the wizard! Was not that the same look—of the same black eyes—that she had encountered up at the corner of the field above the Wier Brake?—a glance of wondering admiration, as it were? And if these two were one and the same man? Of course, that train being lit ran rapidly enough: there were all kinds of parallels—in the elaborate courtesy, in the suave voice, in the bold and eloquent eyes. And she had no magical theory to account for the transformation—it did not even occur to her that the wizard could have changed himself into a young man—there was no dismay or panic in that direction—she instantly took it for granted that it was the young man who had been personating the wizard. And why?—to what end, if this bewildering possibility were to be regarded for an instant? The sole object of the wizard's coming was to point out to her her future husband. And if this young man were himself the wizard? A trick to entrap her?

Ariel himself could not have flashed from place to place more swiftly than this wild conjecture; but the next moment she had collected herself. Her common-sense triumphed. She bethought her of the young man she had just left—of his respectful manners—of the letter he had brought for her father—of the circumstances of his hiding. It was not possible that he had come into the neighbour-

hood for the deliberate purpose of making a jest of her. Did he look like one that would play such a trick; that would name himself as her future husband; that would cozen her into meeting him? She felt ashamed of herself for harbouring such a thought for a single instant. Her wits had gone wool-gathering! Or was it that Prudence's fears had so far got hold of her brain that she could not regard the young man but as something other than an ordinary mortal? In fair justice, she would dismiss this absurd surmise from her mind forthwith; and so she proceeded with her gathering of the flowers; and when she did set forth for home, she had very nearly convinced herself that there was nothing in her head but the tune of Green-sleeves. Nay, she was almost inclined to be angry with Prudence for teaching her to be so suspicious.

Nevertheless, during this protracted dinner, while good Master Izod was enlarging upon the catalogue of persons worthy of honour and emulation, Judith was attacked once more by the whisperings of the demon. For a while she fought against these, and would not admit to herself that any further doubt remained in her mind; but when at last she found herself, despite herself, going back and back to that possibility, she took heart of grace and boldly faced it. What if it were true? Supposing him to have adopted the disguise, and passed himself off as a wizard, and directed her to the spot where she should meet her future husband—what then? What ought she to do? How ought she to regard such conduct? As an idle frolic of

youth? Or the device of one tired of the loneliness of living at the farm, and determined at all hazards to secure companionship? Or a darker snare still—with what ultimate aims she could not divine? Or again (for she was quite frank) if this were merely some one who had seen her from afar, at church or fair or market, and considered she was a good-looking maid, and wished to have further acquaintance, and could think of no other method than this audacious prank? She had heard of lovers' stratagems in plenty; she knew of one or two of such that had been resorted to in this same quiet town of Stratford. And supposing that this was the case, ought she to be indignant? Should she resent his boldness in hazarding such a stroke to win her? And then, when it suddenly occurred to her that, in discussing this possibility, she was calmly assuming that Master Leofric Hope was in love with her—he never having said a word in that direction, and being in a manner almost a stranger to her—she told herself that no audacity on his part could be greater than this on hers; and that the best thing she could do would be to get rid once and for ever of such unmaidenly conjectures. No; she would go back to her original position. The facts of the case were simple enough. He would have brought no letter to her father had he been bent on any such fantastic enterprise. Was it likely he would suffer the thralldom of that farmhouse, and live away from his friends and companions, for the mere chance of a few minutes' occasional talk with a Stratford wench? As for the

similarity between his look and that of the wizard, the explanation lay no doubt in her own fancy, which had been excited by Prudence's superstitious fears. And if in his courtesy he had applied to herself the lines written by the young Devonshire poet—well, that was but a piece of civility and kindness for which she ought to be more than usually grateful, seeing that she had not experienced too much of that species of treatment of late from one or two of her would-be suitors.

She was awakened from these dreams by the conversation suddenly ceasing; and in its place she heard the more solemn tones of the thanksgiving offered up by Master Izod:

“The God of glory and peace, who hath created, redeemed, and presently fed us, be blessed for ever and ever. So be it. The God of all power, who hath called from death that great pastor of the sheep, our Lord Jesus, comfort and defend the flock which he hath redeemed by the blood of the eternal testament; increase the number of true preachers; repress the rage of obstinate tyrants; mitigate and lighten the hearts of the ignorant; relieve the pains of such as be afflicted, but specially of those that suffer for the testimony of thy truth; and finally, confound Satan by the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

And then, as the travellers were continuing their journey forthwith, they proposed to leave; and Master Buller expressed his sorrow that Judith's father had not been at home to have made the friendship of a man so famous as Master Izod; and the good parson, in his turn, as they departed, solemnly blessed the house and all that dwelt therein, whether present or absent. As soon as they were gone Judith besought her mother for the key of the

summer-house, for she wished to lay on her father's table the wild flowers she had brought; and, having obtained it, she carried Prudence with her into the garden; and there they found themselves alone, for Goodman Matthew had gone home for his dinner.

"Dear mouse," said she, quickly, "what is it hath happened to Tom Quiney?"

"I know not, Judith," the other said, in some surprise.

"It is in his mind to leave the country!"

"I knew not that."

"I dare be sworn you did not, sweetheart," said she, "else surely you would have told me. But why? What drives him to such a thing? His business prospers well, as I hear them say; and yet must he forsake it for the company of those desperate men that are going away to fight the Indians beyond seas. Nothing will content him. England is no longer England; Stratford is no longer Stratford: mercy on us, what is the meaning of it all?"

"In truth I know not, Judith."

Then Judith glanced at her.

"Good cousin, I fear me you gave him but a cold welcome yesternight."

"I welcomed him as I would welcome any of my brother's friends," said Prudence, calmly and without embarrassment.

"But you do not understand!" Judith said, with a touch of impatience. "Bless thy heart, young men are such strange creatures; and must have all to suit their humours; and are off and away in their peevish fits if you do not entertain them, and cringe,

and say your worship to every sirrah of them! Oh, they be mighty men of valour in their own esteem; and they must have us poor handmaidens do them honour; and if all be not done to serve, 'tis boot and spur and off to the wars with them, and many a fine tale thereafter about the noble ladies that were kind to them abroad. Marry, they can crow loud enough; 'tis the poor hens that durst never utter a word; and all must give way before his worship! What, then? What did you do? Was not the claret to his liking? Did not your brother offer him a pipe of Trinidado?"

"Indeed, Judith, it cannot be through aught that happened last night, if he be speaking of leaving the country," Prudence said. "I thought he was well content, and right friendly in his manner."

"But you do not take my meaning," Judith said. "Dear heart, bear me no ill will; but I would have you a little more free with your favours. You are too serious, sweet mouse; could you not pluck up a little of the spirit that the pretty Rosalind showed—do you remember?—when she was teasing Orlando in the forest? In truth these men are fond of a varying mood; when they play with a kitten they like to know it has claws. And again, if you be too civil with them, they presume, and would become the master all at once; and then must everything be done to suit their lordships' fantasies, or else 'tis up and away with them, as this one goes."

"I pray you, Judith," her friend said, and now in great embarrassment, "forbear to speak of such things; in truth my heart is not set that way. Right

well I know that if he be leaving the country 'tis through no discontent with me—nor that he would heed in any way how I received him. Nay, 'tis far otherwise; it is no secret whom he would choose for wife; if you are sorry to hear of his going away from his home you know that a word from you would detain him."

"Good mouse, the folly of such thoughts!" Judith exclaimed. "Why, when he will not even give me a 'good-day to you, wench!'"

"You best know what reasons he had for his silence, Judith; I know not."

"Reasons?" said she, with some quick colour coming to her face. "We will let that alone, good gossip. I meddle not with any man's reasons, if he choose to be uncivil to me; God help us, the world is wide enough for all!"

"Did you not anger him, Judith, that he is going away from his home and his friends?"

"Anger him? Perchance his own suspicions have angered him!" was the answer; and then she said, in a gentler tone: "But in truth, sweetheart, I hope he will change his mind. Twenty years—for so he speaks—is a long space to be away from one's native land; there would be many changes ere he came back. Twenty years, he said."

Judith rather timidly looked at her companion; but indeed there was neither surprise nor dismay depicted on the pale and gentle face. Her eyes were absent, it is true; but they did not seem to crave for sympathy.

"'Tis strange," said she, "he said naught of such

a scheme last night, though he and Julius spoke of this very matter of the men who were preparing to cross the seas. I know not what can have moved him to such a purpose."

"Does he imagine, think you," said Judith, "that we shall all be here awaiting him at the end of twenty years, and as we are now? Or is he so sure of his own life?—they say there is great peril in the new lands they have taken possession of beyond sea, and that there will be many a bloody fight ere they can reap the fruit of their labours in peace. Nay, I will confess to thee, sweet mouse, I like not his going. Old friends are old friends, even if they have wayward humours; and fain would I have him remain with us here in Stratford—ay, and settled here, moreover, with a sweet Puritan wife by his side, that at present must keep everything hidden. Well, no matter," she continued, lightly. "I seek no secrets—except those that be in the oaken box within here."

She unlocked the door of the summer-house, and entered, and put the flowers on the table.

"Tell me, Prue," said she, "may we venture to take some more of the play, or must I wait till I have put back the other sheets?"

"You have not put them back?"

"In truth, no," said Judith, carelessly. "I lent them to the young gentleman, Leofric Hope."

"Judith!" her friend exclaimed, with frightened eyes.

"What, then?"

"To one you know nothing of? You have parted with these sheets—that are so valuable?"

"Nay, nay, good gossip," said she, "you know the sheets are cast away as useless. And I but lent them to him for an hour or two, to lighten the tedium of his solitude. Nor was that all, good Prue, if I must tell thee the truth: I would fain have him know that my father can do something worth speaking of, as well as his friend Ben Jonson, and perchance even better: what think you?"

"You have seen him again, then?—this morning?"

"Even so," Judith answered, calmly.

"Judith, why will you run into such danger?" her friend said, in obvious distress. "In truth I know not what 'twill come to. And now there is this further bond in this secret commerce—think you that all this can remain unknown? Your meeting with him must come to some one's knowledge—indeed it must, sweetheart."

"Nay, but this time you have hit the mark," said Judith, complacently. "If you would assure yourself, good Prue, that the young gentleman is no grisly ghost or phantom, methinks you could not do better than ask Tom Quiney, who saw him this very morning—and saw us speaking together, as I guess."

"He saw you?" Prudence exclaimed. "And what said he?"

"He talked large and wild for a space," said Judith, coolly, "but soon I persuaded him there was no great harm in the stranger gentleman. In sooth his mind was so full of his own affairs—and so

bitter against all preachers, ministers, and pastors—and he would have it that England was no longer fit to live in—marry, he told me so many things in so few minutes that I have half forgotten them!”

And then it suddenly occurred to her that this fantasy that had entered her mind in the morning, and that had haunted her during Master Elihu Izod's discourse, would be an excellent thing with which to frighten Prudence. 'Twas but a chimera, she assured herself; but there was enough substance in it for that. And so, when she had carefully arranged the flowers on the table, and cast another longing look at the oaken chest, she locked the door of the summer-house, and put her arm within the arm of her friend, and led her away for a walk in the garden.

“Prudence,” said she, seriously, “I would have you give me counsel. Some one hath asked me what a young maiden should do in certain circumstances that I will put before you; but how can I tell—how can I judge of anything, when my head is in a whirligig of confusion with parson's arguments, and people leaving the country, and I know not what else? But you, good mouse—your mind is ever calm and equable—you can speak sweet words in Israel—you are as Daniel that was so excellent a judge even in his youth——”

“Judith!” the other protested; but indeed Judith's eyes were perfectly grave and apparently sincere.

“Well, then, sweetheart, listen: let us say that a young man has seen a young maiden that is not known to him but by name—perchance at church

it may have been, or as she was walking home to her own door. And there may be reasons why he should not go boldly to her father's house, though he would fain do so; his fancy being taken with her in a small measure, and he of a gentle disposition, and ready to esteem her higher than she deserved. And again it might be that he wished for private speech with her—to judge of her manners and her inclinations—before coming publicly forward to pay court to her: but alack, I cannot tell the story as my father would; 'tis the veriest skeleton of a story; and I fear me you will scarce understand. But let us say that the young man is bold and ingenious, and bethinks him of a stratagem whereby to make acquaintance with the damsel. He writes to her as a wizard that has important news to tell her; and begs her to go forth and meet him; and that on a certain morning he will be awaiting her at such and such a place. Now this maiden that I am telling you of has no great faith in wizards, but being curious to see the juggling, she goes forth to meet him as he asks——”

“Judith, I pray you, speak plain; what is't you mean?” Prudence exclaimed; for she had begun to suspect.

“You must listen, good cousin, before you can give judgment,” said Judith, calmly; and she proceeded: “Now you must understand that it was the young gentleman himself whom she met, though she knew it not; for he had dressed himself up as an ancient wizard, and he had a solemn manner, and Latin speech, and what not. Then says the wizard

to her, I can show you the man that is to be your lover and sweetheart and husband; that will win you and wear you in the time coming; and if you would see him go to such and such a cross-road and he will appear. Do you perceive, now, good Prue, that it was a right safe prophecy, seeing that he had appointed himself to be the very one who should meet her?"

Prudence had gradually slipped her arm away from that of her friend, and now stood still, regarding her breathlessly; while Judith, with eyes quite placid and inscrutable, continued her story.

"'Twas a noteworthy stratagem, and successful withal; for the maiden goes to the cross-road, and there she meets the young gentleman—now in his proper costume. But she has no great faith in magic; she regards him not as a ghost summoned by the wizard; she would rather see in this meeting an ordinary accident, and the young man, being most courteous and modest and civil-spoken, they become friends. Do you follow the story? You see, Prudence, there is much in his condition to demand sympathy and kindness—he being in hiding, and cut off from his friends; and she, not being too industrious, and fond rather of walking in the meadows and the like, meets him now here, now there, but with no other thought than friendliness. I pray you, bear that in mind, sweetheart; for though I esteem her not highly, yet would I do her justice: there was no thought in her mind but friendliness, and a wish to be civil to one that seemed grateful for any such communion. And then, one morning, some-

thing happens—beshrew me if I can tell thee how it happened, and that is the truth—but something happens—an idea jumps into her head—she suspects that this young gentleman is no other than the same who was the wizard, and that she has been entrapped by him, and that he, having played the wizard, would now fain play the lover——”

“Judith, is’t possible? Is’t possible?”

“Hold, cousin, hold; your time is not yet. I grant you ’tis a bold conjecture, and some would say not quite seemly and becoming to a maiden, seeing that he had never spoken any word to her of the kind; but there it was in her head—the suspicion that this young gentleman had tricked her, for his own amusement, or perchance to secure her company. Now, sweet judge in Israel, for your judgment! And on two points, please you. First, supposing this conjecture to be false, how is she to atone to the young gentleman? And how is she to punish herself? And how is she to be anything but uneasy should she chance to see him again? Nay more, how is she to get this evil suspicion banished from her mind, seeing that she dare not go to him and confess, and beg him for the assurance that he had never heard of the wizard? Then the second point: supposing the conjecture to be true, ought she to be very indignant? How should she demean herself? Should she go to him and reproach him with his treachery? She would never forgive it, dear mouse, would she, even as a lover’s stratagem?”

“Judith, I cannot understand you; I cannot

understand how you can even regard such a possibility and remain content and smiling——”

“Then I ought to be indignant?—good cousin, I but asked for your advice!” Judith said. “I must be angry; I must fret and fume, and use hot language, and play the tragedy part? In good sooth, when I think on’t, ’twas a piece of boldness to put himself forward as my future husband—it was indeed—though ’twas cunningly contrived. Marry, but I understand now why my Goodman wizard would take no money from me; ’twas myself that he would have in payment of his skill; and ‘gracious lady’ and ‘sweet lady’—these were the lures to lead me on; and his shepherd’s dial placed on the ground! Then off go beard and cloak; and a couple of days thereafter he is a gay young gallant; and ‘sweet lady’ it is again—or ‘fair lady,’ was’t?—‘know you one Master Shakespeare in the town?’ And such modesty, and such downcast eyes, and an appeal for one in misfortune: heaven save us, was it not well done? Modesty! By my life, a rare modest gentleman! He comes down to Stratford, armed with his London speech and his London manners, and he looks around. Which one, then? which of all the maidens will his lordship choose for wife? ‘Oh,’ saith he, ‘there is Judith Shakespeare; she will do as well as another; perchance better, for New Place is the fairest house in the town, and doubtless she will have a goodly marriage portion. So now how to secure her? how to charm her away from any clownish sweetheart she may chance to have? Easily done, i’ faith!—a country wench is

sure to believe in magic; 'tis but raising my own ghost out of the ground, and a summons to her, and I have her sure and safe, to win and to wear, for better or worse!' " She looked at Prudence. "Heaven's blessings on us all, good Prue, was there ever poor maiden played such a scurril trick?"

"Then your eyes are opened, Judith," said Prudence, eagerly; "you will have naught more to do with such a desperate villain!"

Again Judith looked at her, and laughed.

"I but told a story to frighten thee, dear heart," said she. "A desperate villain? Yes, truly; but 'tis I am the desperate villain to let such rascal suspicions possess me for an instant. Nay, good gossip, think of it!—is't possible that one would dare so much for so poor a prize? That the young gentleman hath some self-assurance, I know; and he can quickly make friends; but do you think, if any such dark design had been his, he would have entered my grandmother's cottage, and ate and drank there, and promised to renew his visit? Sweet judge in Israel, your decision on the other point, I pray you! What penance must I do for letting such cruel thoughts stray into my brain? How shall I purge them away? To whom must I confess? Nay, methinks I must go to the young gentleman himself and say: 'Good sir, I have a friend and a gossip that is named Prudence Shawe, who hath a strange belief in phantom-men and conspirators. I pray you pardon me that through her my brain is somewhat distraught; and that I had half a mind to accuse you of a plot for stealing me away—me, who have

generally this stout mastiff with me. I beseech you, sir, steal me not—nay, forgive me that I ever dreamed of your having any such purpose. 'Tis our rude country manners, good sir, that teach a maid to believe a man may not speak to her without intent to marry her. I pray you pardon me—my heart is kneeling to you, could you but see it—and give me such assurance that you meditated no such thing as will bring me back my scattered senses.' Were not that well done? Shall that be my penance, good mouse?"

"Dear Judith, tell me true," her friend said, almost piteously, "do you suspect him of having played the wizard to cheat you and entrap you?"

"Good cousin," said she, in her frankest manner, "I confess: I did suspect—for an instant. I know not what put it into my head. But sure I am I have done him wrong—marry, 'twere no such deadly sin even had he been guilty of such a trick; but I believe it not—nay, he is too civil and gentle for a jest of the kind. When I see him again, I must make him amends for my evil thinking: do not I owe him as much, sweetheart?"

This was all she could say at present, for Matthew gardener here made his appearance, and that was the signal for their withdrawing into the house. But that afternoon, as Judith bethought her that Master Leofric Hope would be coming to her grandmother's cottage with the manuscript he had promised to return, she became more and more anxious to see him again. Somehow she thought she could more effectually drive away this disquieting surmise

if she could but look at him, and regard his manner, and hear him speak. As it turned out, however, it was not until somewhat late on in the evening that she found time to seek out little Willie Hart, and propose to him that he should walk with her as far as Shottery.

END OF VOL. I.

Black, William

Judith Shakespeare a romance

Bd.: 1

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